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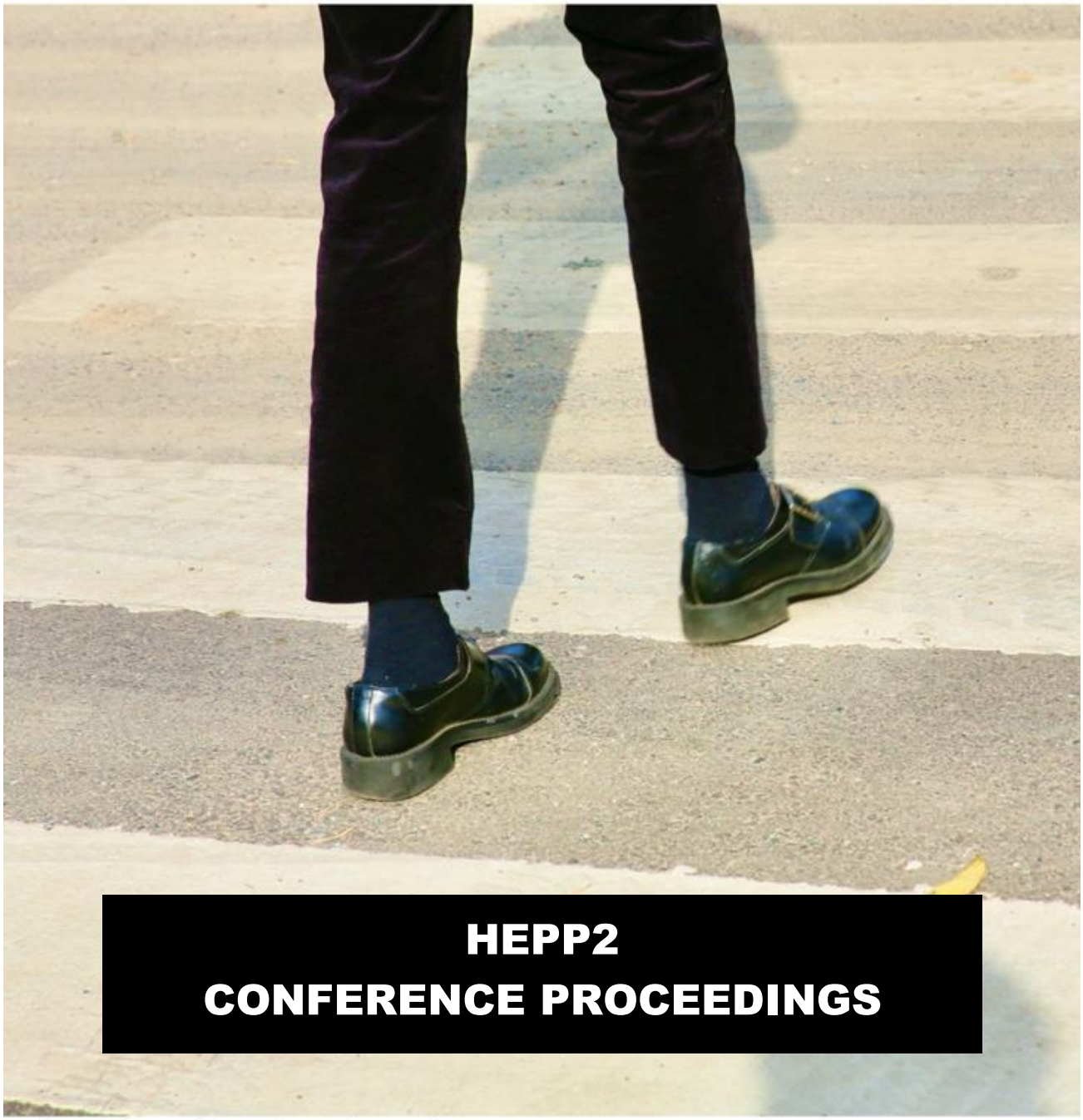

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The Working Paper Series on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation

VOL. 1, Issue 1:

Reflections on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation:

HEPP2 Conference Proceedings

Editors:

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HEPPsinki research group

University of Helsinki

The *Working Papers on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation* is an academic series that publishes both double blind peer-reviewed and non-blind peer reviewed papers on a bi-annual basis. The publications include the HEPP conference proceedings. The series is run by the Helsinki Hub on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation (HEPPsinki), established in 2020 as an umbrella organization and meeting point for a set of interdisciplinary teams collaborating within several externally funded projects since 2017, mainly in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki.

Working Papers in Emotions, Populism and Polarisation

Vol 1.

Reflections on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation (HEPP2 Conference Proceedings)

ISSN: 2737-3657

HEPP2 Conference Proceedings

Helsinki 2021

FOREWORD

Dear reader,

You are holding (or more likely staring at) the first volume of the HEPPsinki working paper series: *Working Papers on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation*. This first volume includes conference proceedings from the Second HEPPsinki Conference on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation (HEPP), organised virtually on 3-5 May 2021 at the University of Helsinki. The Conference and the Working Paper Series are organised by the Helsinki Hub on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation, HEPP or HEPPsinki, as we like to call it.

The virtual hub was set up in late spring 2020, following our successful First HEPPsinki conference and our Helsinki Summer School courses on rhetoric-performative post-foundational discourse analysis and on populism in 2019, as well as positive funding decisions for two major research projects from the Academy of Finland in 2018 and the Kone Foundation in 2019. The practical trigger was the administrative requirement for us to generate more websites for our projects, plus the academic need to generate collaboration between different projects, where people were working on related themes and would benefit from interaction. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we decided to set up just one more website — using the familiar name of our first conference — and start meeting virtually on a weekly basis.

Virtual meetings also created a basis for virtual collaboration. We had already started using MS Teams during our work on the Academy of Finland funded project *Whirl of Knowledge: Cultural Populism and Polarisation in European Societies and Politics*, which used a common dataset for social media research. All of that was a learning-by-doing experience, which is how we like to "do stuff" here at HEPPsinki – which I attribute to my roots at the Bauhaus Kolleg Dessau. Not always conventional, not always convenient, but with a lot of potential. This also set the basis for our second major project, *Now Time Us Space: Mobilisations and Politicisations in Central Eastern Europe*, funded by the Kone Foundation in 2020-2023.

We made the most out of MS Teams for the conference we organised in 2021, and although I know at least one colleague who dropped out because of the virtual platform (sceptics do exist), the feedback from the event was extremely positive. This also led us to share the conference papers. The conference papers are an important way of communicating on-going research and accounting for the type of themes discussed in a conference.

In choosing our theme and selecting participants, we wanted to be quite inclusive in 2021, in order to a wide range of themes develop at the conference. The papers we showcase in the *HEPP2 Conference Proceedings*, *Vol. 1.* in the HEPP series *Working Papers on Emotions, Populism and Polarisation* are a good selection. We have papers that conceptualise populism and polarisation, or emotions such as empathy. They also deal with democracy, conspiracy theories and biopolitics. Some papers take a historical perspective, such as Early Turkish populism; others discuss the media and populist or far right actors. A couple of the papers deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. The cases range, as they do in HEPPsinki in general, from the Latin America to Europe, Turkey and even beyond, starting with Kerala in India.

We present the papers to you in alphabetical order by author, but this also seemed to work somewhat thematically. The authors, who graciously responded to our call and patiently waited for the launch of the series, represent several disciplines and countries.

This volume presents a great start for the series, pertinent in the time of affective politics, the emergence and persistence of bipolar confrontations and rhetoric on us vs. them. In the pandemic period, allegiances have been reformulated, and the power of social media intertwines with biopolitics and inclusion and exclusion. In these moments, beliefs and confrontations of the past are important again, or they gain new forms. One of the thriving ideas in our HEPPsinki projects is to consider transnational flows of ideas, reconnect to past eras and their confrontations and to see how, in the present, the past is becoming ever more important.

Hopefully Volume 1 in our new series will provide inspiration for those tackling contemporary politics or doing research on phenomena ranging from emotions to past polarisations. I trust it can offer both new conceptual and analytical power and international examples in contemporary struggles.

Happy reading, and welcome back to Helsinki – this time hopefully in person to present and online to follow our keynotes at the HEPP3 conference in 15-18 June 2022. The research continues, despite the pandemics.

On behalf of all the HEPPsters,

Emilia Palonen, The Editor of Working Papers in Emotions, Populism and Polarisation

Emilia Palonen is Senior Researcher in Political Science at the University of Helsinki. She leads HEPPsinki, the Academy of Finland project *WhiKnow*, Kone-funded *NowTimeUsSpace* and is the PI at the Horizon-funded *DRad*. She has a BA in Contemporary East European Studies (London) and an MA and PhD in Ideology and Discourse Analysis (Essex).

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction

This volume hosts fifteen papers that bring together theoretical, case-based and thematic perspectives on populism, polarisation and emotions. It features proposals for theoretical and methodological innovations, as well as national and regional insights from Brazil, Finland, Germany, India, Italy, Romania and Turkey. In collecting these papers for publication, while aiming for a diversity of topics and regions, we were excited to find such strong interconnections between papers that were consistent with the themes of interest for us at the HEPPsinki research group. These include the following links between polarisation and negative/positive emotions, the context of populism formation and the role played by media in the process, country-specific contemporary and historical explorations and, importantly, the political effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and its (mis-)management.

Below, we introduce these papers organized broadly within these themes. The brief summaries should guide you in exploring your topics of interest in this volume and, we hope, discover new ones.

Theoretical papers on populism and polarisation

Polarisation is a central theme for several authors featured in this volume, who propose theoretical innovations on topics such as the affective dimension of polarisation, the role of hybrid media, and the political contexts in which populism may thrive or fail.

The connection between polarisation, antagonism and affects is examined in three papers. In a study drawing on governmentality research and the concept of antagonism, Gonzales proposes a new concept of polarisation, highlighting three attributes: visible interactions between antagonistic discourses, the logic behind politics and the formation of the polarized subject. Insero brings in the role of empathy in polarisation and how it fits in with the negative feelings associated with the conflictual politics of ‘us vs. them’ dynamics. Sawyer develops a theoretical framework for an affective perspective on how populist candidates use narratives of conspiracy for political mobilisation. He suggests that the main drivers of conspiracy theory success are the delegitimation of opponents and the self-positioning of populists as ‘defenders of the people’.

Finally, a theoretical contribution on the impact of hybrid media on polarisation comes from Kekki’s paper on media-based public debates as spaces for learning from other members of society. She argues that such debates, although functioning as forums of exchanging ideas, are not incompatible with polarisation and may in some cases deepen it.

Papers addressing the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic is a running theme across several papers studying various aspects of its political impact in India, Germany and Brazil.

In his paper on the Indian state of Kerala, Afzal examines how its initial success in containing the pandemic has increased a sense of local pride and provided Pinarayi Vijayan, the chief minister of Kerala, with ways to project himself into a 'heroic' position, thus increasing his popularity.

In the EU, and more specifically in Germany, Keil connects the Covid-19 pandemic with issues of crisis management and examines the pandemic's impact on the European far-right as a relevant social force. By looking specifically at AfD in Germany, he finds that the imaginary of a post-pandemic Europe is an essential factor in both the formation of new alliances and in political fragmentations along multiplied conflict lines in Europe.

In Brazil, the Covid-19 pandemic is examined from both a contemporary and a comparative historical perspective. Lopes Loureiro analyses pandemic related fake news narratives and their impact on the popular rejection of science-based methods of disease prevention and management. She finds evidence of a connection between fake news evoking feelings of outrage and the identity and increased radicalism of Jair Bolsonaro's presidency. From a historical perspective, Lins compares how crisis management, disease and the past are discursivised in Brazil through a biopolitical lens during the yellow fever in the 1850s, the Spanish flu in the early 1900s and the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Country case studies across the world

In addition to theoretical and Covid-19 related research, this volume features several country-based studies offering contemporary and historical insights on populism and polarisation.

A historical analysis on the evolution of populism is conducted by Cay and Deregözü, who trace how its understanding and practice changed in the early 20th century, from the late Ottoman Empire to the Early Turkish Republic. Along the way, they find connections with Russian populism via the pre-capitalist structures of the Ottoman Empire and Russia.

Issues of contemporary populism are mainly focused on European populism and polarisation, in Romania, Finland, Italy and Germany. However, further insights from Brazil are also included, with Schargel's study of the conceptual opposition between populism and fascism within Bolsonarism, where he argues that Jair Bolsonaro's rise to power is a symptom of two decades of right-wing movements in Brazil.

Gușă, Räsänen and Schmalenberger explore different facets of the recent rise of populism in the EU. Gușă tackles the topic of corruption as a populist rhetoric by looking at the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, a newly emerged populist party, and its social media campaign strategy during the 2020 Romanian parliamentary elections. She finds that, typically of populist parties, the party used corruption vaguely, as an anti-establishment argument, rather than expressing an intention to address the issue in practice. Räsänen's comparative study of media communication strategies and media representation

looks at recently mainstreamed populist parties in Finland and Italy during the countries' respective political crises in 2019. Her findings show that populist politicians in both countries expressed an 'us vs. them' rhetoric with respect to other parties, and that both elite and commercial media have amplified the populist message and resulting polarisation. Finally, in Germany Schmalenberger frames AfD within the counter-hegemonic, affective understanding of populism, where AfD articulates an alternative German-ness as political subject position. The paper also lays the foundations for a methodological framework meant to bridge the gap between abstract affects and their concrete representations within populist projects.

The papers in this volume highlight the urgency of populism, polarisation and emotions as developing research topics. Of particular interest for us at HEPP are the effects of populism and polarisation on democracy (especially in the present context of fragile or deteriorating democracies), the increasing role of social media in how, and in what kinds of spaces, politics is now conducted, and the long-term potential of the Covid-19 crisis to transform political landscapes. In the following pages you will find different avenues for exploring these topics.

We hope these papers will not only inform you, but also inspire you to develop, research and collaborate with the authors, and with us at HEPPsinki!

Laura-Elena Sibinescu

"We are Doing Better": Local Pride, Collective Identity, and the Question of Populism in Kerala

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Abstract

In this paper I trace the trajectory of populism in the south Indian state of Kerala through an analysis of the discussions around the popularity of the current chief minister of the state, who represents the Communist Party, in the context of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the mobilization of the popular identity called Malayali. Following the relative success of Kerala in containing the spread of Covid-19 in the initial stage, the "Kerala Model of Development" has again attracted global attention, leading to a sense of "local pride" among the people of Kerala. I examine how the pandemic has provided the "leader" with another opportunity to project himself as a "hero" who addresses the people directly. The daily press conferences, through which the chief minister addressed the people "directly", have been one of the reasons for the rise in his popularity. While the presence of 24/7 news channels as well as the proliferation of social media platforms have made the communication between the leader and the people a direct one, as characteristic of any populist politics, I argue for the need to connect the popularity of the chief minister with the longer and distinct trajectory of populism in India. The paper connects the image of the chief minister as a "hero of the people" with the longer history of populist politics in the state where the communist melodramas of the mid-twentieth century played an important role in imagining a radical politics for the newly formed linguistic state of Kerala. The paper, thus, revisits the populist mobilizations in the mid-twentieth century when a collective identity or "we-ness" was imagined around the question of egalitarian developmentalism and greater common good, and argues how the current moment of Covid-19 pandemic can be seen as another "populist moment" when the collective identity is again mobilized. This mobilization acquires more significance in the context of the competing visions of nation in India.

Keywords: left populism, COVID-19 pandemic, local pride, collective identity, Kerala

Introduction

With the initial success in containing the spread of COVID-19 in the early stage of the pandemic, the South Indian state of Kerala has once again received much global attention. As a result of the attention that "Kerala Model" of COVID-19 containment received, the "Kerala Model of Development", which figured in scholarly discussions for the first time in 1970s, has once again come to prominence. The Kerala Model of Development was characterised by higher levels of social development despite lower economic growth. Scholarly writings often attribute the credit for the Kerala Model to the parliamentary

Left in Kerala and the "policy regime" it established. While Kerala's social development has been discussed in relation to subnationalism in the region, particularly by Prerna Singh (2017), in this paper my attempt is to go beyond the narratives of subnationalism, especially in the context of the popularity of the Pinarayi Vijayan, the current chief minister of Kerala, who represents the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and connect it with the longer history of populism in Kerala which I would characterize as a kind of Left-populism.

I take the popularity and electoral success of Pinarayi Vijayan as a starting point to offer a discussion of the distinct nature of populism in Kerala which corresponds to what Chantal Mouffe calls left populism. The current chief minister of the south Indian state of Kerala has been able to come back to power in the recent election, which is a rare electoral trend in Kerala. Many commentators attribute this success to effective governance and the successful handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. From the onset of the pandemic, there have been discussions on how we are in a "populist moment" with many commentators and scholars arguing that right wing populists will be at an advantageous position. Looking at the pandemic as a conjuncture, which is different from the 2008 financial crisis when the Left was not able to develop it into an organic crisis, Mouffe argues that

> a 'left-populist' strategy is very relevant in the present conjuncture. Mouffe argues that a left populist strategy acknowledges that politics is a partisan activity in which affects play an important role. Drawing a political frontier between 'us' and 'them', the 'people' and the 'oligarchy', it is able at mobilizing the affective dimension that is at play in the construction of collective forms of identification. (Mouffe 2020).

Through a national-popular project, the Left in Kerala has been able to achieve hegemony in the mid-twentieth century. However, in the last few decades, this hegemony has been challenged by the emergence of various social movements centred around questions of cultural identity. In addition, the recent years have witnessed the rise of right-wing populism at the national level, the effects of which are palpable at the state level as well. The paper argues that the Left has been able to seize the "populist moment" to reinvent its hegemony, and in this process the Left has been able to reconstruct a people. The paper particularly looks at the collective mobilization of affects through local pride and solidarity, and how the popularity of Pinarayi Vijayan is connected with the longer history of left populism in the region.

Making Sense of Populism in the Indian Context

While populism has been mostly understood in negative terms, especially with the growth of right-wing populists across the world, in this paper I draw on the formulations of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to understand populism. For Laclau, "populism is the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such" (2005:67) and "the political operation *par excellence* is always going to be the construction of a 'people'" (157). Laclau's formulations on the construction of a 'people' help us to make sense of the question of populism in the context of Kerala.

Writing about populism in the Indian context, Partha Chatterjee makes a distinction between populism at the pan India level and at the level of linguistic states. What is of importance here is the question of popular sovereignty. Drawing on Madhava Prasad's argument that language plays a constitutive role in the construction of political subjects, Partha Chatterjee stresses on the importance of regional language communities in understanding populism at the state level. Partha Chatterjee and Madhava Prasad point out the dimension of visual representation or visual imagery in populist mobilizations in the Indian context. Chatterjee for instance points out that **"**what Indian populism also shows with compelling force is the effectiveness of visual representation in popular mobilization. Cinema and the melodramatic narrative form have had a direct influence on populist politics in India" (Chatterjee 2020: xvi).

The question of development occupying centre stage is not unique to Kerala. However, what is of interest to this paper is the particular way in which the question of development was mediated in Kerala and the distinct aesthetic through which this was mobilized. The Developmental state in postcolonial India has been predominantly understood in terms of passive revolution. Characterizing the Indian Independence as an instance of passive revolution, Partha Chatterjee argues that "passive revolution is in fact the general framework of capitalist transition in societies where bourgeois hegemony has not been accomplished in the classical way" (Chatterjee 1993:212). However, in the case of Kerala, the framework of passive revolution is inadequate, as Nissim Mannathukaren (2011) argues.

COVID Crisis and Local Pride

As Jeroen de Kloet et. al. point out in their article "'We are doing better': Biopolitical nationalism and the COVID-19 virus in East Asia", the pandemic has stirred up nationalist as well as localist sentiments across the globe. Many countries have taken pride that they are handling the pandemic better than other countries. In India, the Prime Minister has often claimed that India has been a model for other nations to emulate. However, within India, due to its federal structure, and the competing versions of nationalism at the Pan-India level and at the level of states, the performance of each state is compared. The initial success of Kerala in containing the spread of COVID-19 received attention both nationally and internationally. Given that Kerala, the southernmost state in India, has a high population density and a significant diasporic population, the region was seen as particularly susceptible to the virus. While the first case of Covid-19 in India was reported in Kerala in January 2020, by mid-May 2020, Kerala was celebrated for flattening the curve. Writing for *The Guardian*, Laura Spinney called Kerala's health minister K K Shailaja Teacher "the Coronavirus slayer". International magazines like *The Economist* also hailed Kerala's success. While the celebration may have been a premature one, as the subsequent developments showed, the perception that Kerala was doing better was shared by a majority of Keralites. In a highly mediatized environment, many people took to social media platforms to share their "local pride".

With the declaration of lockdown in March 2020 in many parts of the world, many Keralites working in other states as well as countries were not able to return to Kerala. On social media, there was an outpouring of posts where many expatriate Keralites expressed the feeling that they would have been better off if they were in Kerala. The various measures such as providing free food grains that the state government adopted were able to generate a trust among the people. While providing targeted benefits

have been seen as a populist measure in discussions on populism in south India, there was a perceived disdain among the people of Kerala towards such measures. Given the exceptional claims made on behalf of politics in Kerala, in which the state is presented as different from its neighbouring states where people are seen as falling for populist measures, the distribution of free food grains generated discussion in Kerala public sphere. While some commentators have linked the electoral success of the Left front in Kerala, one has to take into account that targeted benefits are not enough to secure the mandate of people. Partha Chattejee argues that

> One aspect of populism in India consists of the distribution of targeted benefits to current and potential supporters, a form of governmental action not inconsistent with neoliberal techniques. Yet in an electoral democracy without strong ideological identification of voters with parties, there is every chance of a spiral of competitive populism in which rival parties announce more and more such benefits to woo voters. The other aspect of Indian populism is the ability of leaders and regimes to cope with changes in electoral conditions by rhetorically shifting the composition of "the people" and "the enemy." (Chatterjee 2020: xv)

While the two major rivalling political alliances in the state had also declared more targeted benefits in their election manifesto, it did not have much success, owing to the question of ideological identification.

The measures taken for the well-being of the migrant population in Kerala, and the transparent manner in which Covid-related information was shared with the people were also well-received. In a place where popular cinema acts as a collective unconscious, references to popular culture in government communications were able to emotionally connect with the people. In addition to a significant diasporic population, there is also a significant migrant population within Kerala. In many parts of the world, gaining the trust of the migrant population has been very crucial in the Covid containment strategies. As many commentators have pointed out, the pandemic has brought into open the prejudice existing among migrant workers. In the context of Kerala, the question of migrants acquires more significance, given that the lockdown declared by the Union Government has been criticized for the precarious conditions the migrants have been subjected to. Kerala's positioning of itself as a state that takes care of all the people who live within was able to generate a narrative of inclusiveness.

Considering that there has already been a tension existing between the Pan-Indian nationalism of the ruling party at the centre and the communist nationalism of the Left project in Kerala, "the Kerala model of development" was invoked to generate affective attachments. In addition to the measures undertaken by the government, the praise that medical professionals from Kerala who work in other states and countries received for their efficiency was able to generate collective pride among the people.

In her discussion of the pandemic as a populist moment, Mouffe points out how the failure of institutions to act constitutes the populist moment. However, in Kerala it is the effectiveness of the institutional structure that constitutes the populist moment in Kerala good one. In order to make sense of this, one has to trace the longer relationship between state and radical democracy, and the question of popular sovereignty in Kerala. Manali Desai has argued that the state has played an important role in the democratization of the society in the mid-twentieth century. She notes:

> the institutionalization of the Communists and their affiliated movements and organizations in Kerala has created a 'policy regime' that exists regardless of whether the Congress or CPM holds power, although fierce competition and ideological differences between the two parties certainly do threaten policies implemented by the other. In Kerala, policy legacies over the twentieth century have also rendered the state's role in promoting welfare a crucial part of any democratization project (Desai 2007:140).

Kloet et. al. have argued how the compliance to the surveillance measures in East Asia shows a different dimension of bio-politics which they call "biopolitical nationalism". In Kerala the affective attachment with the government has led to people following the COVID-19 protocols more effectively. People's willingness to comply with surveillance measures can be seen as a result of the affective communication. At the same time, one has to also take into account the fact that the then government already had the trust of the people for successfully handling major crises like two consecutive floods and a very deadly Nipah outbreak. For instance, in 2018 itself, the chief minister was described as a "crisis manager" by the national media. As Mouffe points out "to generate loyalty and move people to act, it has to convey affects that resonate with their desires and personal experiences."

Solidarity and Collective Identity

Writing in June 2020, Prerna Singh argued that at the core of Kerala's success in the containment of the contagion is "a shared Malayali solidarity grounded in a common language and culture that extends across different religious and caste groups, and regions of the state" (Singh 2020). She argued that

> Malayali subnationalism has been used to mobilize popular support for the campaign against COVID-19. The 'Break the Chain' campaign has embedded public health advisories within a shared cultural frame, including Malayalam cinema, making them at once more accessible and affectively appealing (Singh 2020).

This takes us back to the question of Left populism in the mid-twentieth century. When modern Kerala was imagined as a linguistic state in the aftermath of India's independence, egalitarian developmentalism was central to the imagination. Recent writings on populism in the Indian context highlight how populist mobilizations around linguistic identity adopt an inclusive development strategy. As J. Devika has argued, the idea of "a people united in development" was central to imagining a modern Malayali identity.

Characterizing the Indian state as an instance of passive revolution, Partha Chatterjee argues that "passive revolution is in fact the general framework of capitalist transition in societies where bourgeois hegemony has not been accomplished in the classical way" (Chatterjee 1993:212). Passive revolution has remained as an impediment to popular sovereignty. However, in the case of Kerala, the framework of passive revolution is inadequate, as Nissim Mannathukaren argues. In Kerala a distinct developmental aesthetic was in place in the mid-twentieth century itself. The popular Malayalam film *Puthiya Akasam Puthiya Bhoomi* (New Horizon, New Land, dir. M.S. Mani, 1961) for instance narrativizes the developmental aesthetic.

The construction of collective identities or a "people" always require the construction of a frontier between "us" and "them". In the context of the pandemic the frontier is created between the people of Kerala and the virus. At the same time, the virus, as a metaphor has been extended to various other forces which offer a challenge to the Left's hegemony. The collective spirit was highlighted in many communications. For instance, social distancing was translated as "physical distancing and social unity". This acquires significance given the caste connotations of social distancing in the Indian context, as well as the xenophobic connotations of the pandemic.

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A Phenomenological Approach to Populism and Imagination

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Abstract

My paper aims to discuss the role of imagination in shaping the populist conception of politics. As some scholars have shown, in modern politics, the imaginary capacity performs a central function in modern politics, since it produces plausible narratives supporting solidarity, legitimacy, and sovereignty as the key political concepts. However, this 'poetic' capacity, as a collective process, could lose its strength in critical situations so that the collective imaginary would not be able anymore to perform its constitutive and positive function. I put forward the idea that the pathological forms of collective imaginary, including populist discourses, are the result of the absence, or the malfunction of, imaginary dynamism in a community. In such a situation, the social imaginary would transform into political and social myths. Populism could be considered as an instance of such pathology.

Keywords: populism, imagination, phenomenology, social imaginary, myth

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My paper aims to discuss the role of imagination in shaping the populist conception of politics. As some scholars have shown, in modern politics, the imaginary capacity performs a central function, since it produces plausible narratives supporting solidarity, legitimacy, and sovereignty as the key concepts of politics. However, this poetic capacity, as a collective process, could lose its strength in difficult situations so that the collective imaginary would not be able anymore to perform its constitutive function. The pathological forms of collective imaginary, including populist discourses, are the results of the absence, or the malfunction of, imaginary dynamism in a community. In such a situation, the social imaginary would transform into political and social myths. Populism could be construed as an instance of such pathology.

As political scientists demonstrate, populism is a very vague concept as the object of academic investigation. Any attempt to define populism in terms of its examples would be useless since there is no common empirical feature according to which one can define this phenomenon. Thus, none of the theories has been able to cover all cases and explain all aspects of populism. The only feature all of the cases have in common is a rhetorical style, which relies heavily on appeals to the people (Canovan 1984: 313). Moreover, there is no consensus even on the nature of populism. Some scholars consider it the ideology of democracy, as its key concepts are similar to those of democracy. On the other hand, populism often has been construed as counter-democratic, the pathology of representative politics, or the pathology of constitutional democracy. Various scholars have defined and studied populism using different terms, such as: 'logic', 'discourse', 'ideology', 'strategy', 'performance', 'style', and 'identity politics.

Since an explanation for all cases of populism based on its common features and under one theoretical roof seems impossible, the phenomenological study, based on *a posteriori* analysis, would be a better strategy (Canovan 1982: 549). However, such a phenomenological approach should neither be confined to the empirical study in terms of classification of cases nor should it be reduced, as Pierre Rosanvallon accurately pointed out, to the study of its demagogical and rhetorical dimensions (Rosanvallon 2017). Rather, one can use the phenomenological strategy to explore the "ideational

elements" of populism (Mudde 2017), which are mirrored not only in its rhetorical styles but also in the mentality it cultivates. What is at stake in the study of the populist mentality is the exploration of emotional, phantasmagorical, and imaginary aspects, as well as the interpretation of the processes in which these non-rational dynamics work in the so-called disenchanted societies.

However, it should be noted that the above-mentioned elements are not merely individual and psychological. Rather, they should be considered as collective or inter-subjective. A populist discourse does not result from or is not reducible to, the individual mentality of a populist leader, but it is connected to a collective imagination or a social fantasy. Thus, Political phenomenology, as it addresses social and political life as a common world, or *Lebenswelt*, is of relevance to the study of populist imaginary. In this context, the theories of political phenomenology would be useful, since it addresses the non-rational dynamics and elements in modern politics.

In the second half of the 20th century, a wave of interest in political phenomenology appeared among political theorists. Among others, the influence of important philosophers such as Claude Lefort, Paul Ricœur, and Hannah Arendt are worth mentioning (Legros 1996). These thinkers in different ways have attempted to make use of the phenomenological approach and concepts to provide political theories. Political phenomenologists attempt to explain the logic and dynamics behind political phenomena, instead of providing normative political philosophies. Hence, they have discussed the role of non-rational dimensions in politics. Lefort's account of symbolic dimensions of politics, Ricœur's emphasis on the social imaginary, and Arendt's conception of imagination and storytelling in politics are instances of the political phenomenological approach to the political.

As some scholars of populism have pointed out, a theory of populism should distinguish between two vertical and horizontal axes, taking both of them into account (Taguieff 1995; Brubaker 2017). Paul Ricœur, using two concepts of legitimization and integration as two functions of social imaginary, showed that in a well-ordered society, social imaginary performs these two horizontal and vertical aspects (Ricœur 1986a: 417-431). In the phenomenological tradition of political theory, both aspects are important based on two phenomenological dimensions. The horizontal aspect is connected to the society and the vertical aspect is represented by the state and representative institutions. In addition, phenomenological approaches emphasize the role of faith in politics describing the ways through which the secular faith and trust is made by fiction, imagination, and make-believe (Critchley 2012: 81).

Therefore, political phenomenology can be used as an analytical or theoretical framework for understanding various aspects of modern politics, whose relevance have been overlooked by contemporary normative theories of political philosophy. Given the political and social situation of the 21st century, which has been called the post-secular age, the importance of political phenomenology has been increasingly recognized by political theorists. In this context, the phenomenological approach to politics addresses "the political" rather than "politics" (political institutions and processes), demonstrating the persistence of some theological (in a very broad sense) problems in the "secularized" world (Lefort 2014; Mouffe 2005).

As Ernst Kantorowicz in his seminal book The King's Two Bodies shows, in the medieval theory of kingship, there was a fiction according to which the king had two bodies: the natural body and the body politic, which was construed as permanent and immortal (Kantorowicz 1957). His book sketches a

history of representation in the political sphere. As Victoria Kahn observes, Kantorowicz's main problem is "representational fictions" (Kahn 2014: 88). What is important in Kantorowicz is his different account of embodiment and its political implications. Transferred from the king to the people, Kantorowicz's account paved the way for democratic accounts of the political based on "people's two bodies." According to this concept, the people have a body politic as an abstract whole or one, and another body as multitude or many, to some extent similar to the distinction between empirical people and abstract people.

Some scholars attempted to use Kantorowicz's account as a theoretical framework for understanding liberal democracy and its pathological forms. As a nominalist political theology, the two bodies' doctrine allows us to evaluate populism in terms of a different account. In this account, the embodiment of the people is not concrete and visible, unlike what Carl Schmitt had proposed. Rather, representation occurs in a fictional body (Sanchez 2019: 184). It is undeniable that without a corporate "body," a community of any kind cannot act collectively. In this sense, the embodiment is a necessary part of any social and political unity. Processes such as organization, decision-making, collective action, and integration require a popular body politic. Hence, a body politic seems to be necessary for any kind of government. If so, what would be the difference between democratic and populist conceptions of embodiment?

Populism, as Cas Mudde proposed, is based on two interconnected principles: the people as a whole and the general will of the people (Mudde 2004: 543). Regarding the concept of the people, the distinction between two bodies (rather than one in the Schmittian account) allows us to separate the people as body politic (incarnated) and the people as represented and mediated by social institutions (Müller 2016: 110). Moreover, the concept of the general will as another basis of populism could be conceived differently. Recent theories of political theology reinterpret Rousseau's account of democracy in terms of fiction and imagination (Crtichly 2012: 34-35). Thus, the issue at stake would not be the realization of the general will in fixed terms. Rather, will-formation would be an imaginary process. The (social) imaginary, different from (individual) imagination, is defined as an intersubjective and shared realm, a background through which people imagine their social existence (Gatens & Lloyd 1999: 143). In this context, as Jean-Jacques Wunenburger argues, the general will should not be used to actually and effectively give a body to the people. Rather, it is a metaphor, an image to provide an ideal model, with recourse to which individuals could dispense a part of their interests for becoming citizens. Thus, the concept of the general will of the people would play a positive role in politics if it were considered as a constructed imaginary, not as an organism or embodiment (Wunenburger 2001: 85-90). The same approach should be applied to understand key concepts such as solidarity, identity, and the community of the people. For instance, as Kevin Olson observes, we need a way to distinguish the production of "collective" identities in general from the narrower set of cases that we would characterize as "populist" or "of the people." Populism is the process of unifying identities (and actions) while democratic politics is associated with collective identities (and actions). Collective identity cannot become a single unit, but it is through the political imaginary that the individuals form one will and one indivisible agency (Olson 2016: 34).

Drawing on Kantorowicz, the French phenomenologist Claude Lefort discusses this imaginary aspect of modern politics under the title of the "symbolic dimension" of the political. Lefort discusses the theological-political problem and its persistence in modern politics, which he describes by the expression

"religious sensibility." Against Schmitt's argument for the medieval idea of the "fullness of power" for the sovereign, Lefort emphasizes the necessity of the "emptiness of power". Democracies are distinguished by this emptiness, which never can be occupied by a person (Lefort 2014: 30). The empty place between the ideal and the real, between the symbolic and the power, neither can nor should be closed by political representation and embodiment, since democracy requires the constant and active production of emptiness (Disch 2009: 50-51). The utility of the category of fiction here is that it obfuscates any attempt to locate power in one particular place or one particular body. Authoritarian ideologies always attempt to bridge this gap by possessing this symbolically empty place. But this gap is in the nature of democracy and rooted in the promises of democracy that have not been fulfilled, and in a certain sense, they cannot be fulfilled at all (Müller 2016: 76). In other words, populism always claims to resolve the paradoxes of democracy (Canovan 2002), or even the paradoxes of politics itself (Urbinati 2013: 148). However, these are intrinsic gaps and paradoxes of democracy: power belongs to the people, and at the same time, it belongs to no one in particular. There is a constant interplay of institutions claiming to act on behalf of the people. Populism, contrarily, denies the constitutive role of conflict and the representative character of power claims in democracy (Corrias 2016: 21).

Populist discourse is always based upon the fantasy of a mystical union, which could be understood as the pathological form of the collective imagination. As Paul Ricœur argues, social imaginaries should not be evaluated based on their coincidence with reality. Rather, what is of relevance is the function of the imaginary, namely its capacity to provide a collective identity and to pull disparate people together. In the situation of crisis, when the social imaginary cannot perform its positive and constitutive functions, it could be transformed into pathologic forms such as fantasy and distortion (Ricœur 1986: 310). Paul Taggart described this deviant manifestation of imagination as the "heartland", which is the basic idea of populism. Like utopia, the heartland is imaginary; however, unlike utopia, it is not rational but a romantic or mystic body (Taggart 2000: 95-9). Losing its dynamic and dialectical dimension, the collective imagination becomes reified, unified, and sentimental. In politics, the role of imagination and poiesis is central, since they produce fictions supporting solidarity, legitimacy, and sovereignty as the crucial concepts of politics. However, this poetic capacity, as a collective process, could lose its strength in difficult situations, so that the collective imaginary would not be able anymore to perform its constitutive function. The pathological forms of collective imaginary are the results of the absence, or the malfunction of, imaginary dynamism in a community.

Thus, populism, to use Cassirer's term, is based on a political myth, i.e. the myth of the people. Political myths represent a collective desire which has reached an overwhelming strength in critical moments and whose intensity is embodied in a leader. Cassirer mentions two important features for the situation out of which a myth arises: first, when rational means are not available; second, when the other binding forces of man's social life lose their strength. In such a situation, what remains is the mystical power and authority of the leader (Cassirer 1946: 280). Myth is not the description of things, but a determination to act. The myth of the people, hence, is a fantasy that populist leaders make use to excite people. However, the rise of populism is not necessarily connected to the lack of critical thinking and rationality. Rather, it is connected to the absence of constitutive imaginary dynamism. From a metaphysical point of view, populism, as the crisis in political representation and social integration, is connected to the crisis of mediation. And mediation is always an imaginary activity (Ricœur 1993). Through collective

imagination, the multitude or mass becomes the people as a collective identity. The absence of this collective imagination to perform its mediative function could pave the way for myths: the myth of the people as a whole, which stems from the absence of dynamism of social integration, and the myth of the general will which stems from the lack of representation.

As mentioned above, a populist discourse does not result from or is not reducible to, the individual mentality of a populist leader, but it is connected to a collective imagination or a social fantasy. According to Ricœur, the social imaginary has two expressions: Ideology and utopia, each of which has both positive/constitutive and negative/pathological functions. The balance between them makes that a social imaginary would be capable of performing its positive role (integration of society and hope for the future). Thus, social imaginaries should not be evaluated based on their coincidence with historical reality. Rather, what is of relevance is the function of imaginary, i.e. the capacity to provide a collective identity and to pull disparate people together. However, the pathological form of ideology (distortion of the past) and utopia (fantasy about the future) would be detrimental. Populist discourses suffer from this dysfunctional relationship between past and future, rooted in an unbalanced social imaginary. Hence, a populist discourse is always based upon the fantasy of a mystical union, which could be understood as the pathological form of the collective imagination. Populism appears when the idea of the people is considered as a whole, homogenous, and reified myth, possessing a will that cannot err and is incarnated in a leader. Hence, an imaginary account of embodiment, rather than incarnation as a political myth, would help to avoid the deficits of populist conceptions of politics.

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The Early Turkish Populism

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Abstract

Although populism, one of the six fundamental pillars of Kemalist ideology, officially entered the Turkish constitution in 1937, its origins can be traced back to the Second Constitutional Period, İkinci Meşrutiyet in Ottoman Empire. Among others, Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura, one of the catalyst intellectuals of the Meşrutiyet regime, formulated the Turkish populism that was heavily influenced by the Russian Narodnik movement, but this concept was interpreted differently during the early republican period of Turkey. Earlier studies assumed that Turkish populism is a rigid and unchangeable ideology however, unlike assumption; it has always renewed itself and reflected the economic and social conditions of the period. Thus, this study aimed to prove, briefly, how understanding and practice of populism has changed from the late Ottoman Empire period to the early Turkish Republic.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Turkish populism, elites, political communication, Narodnik

It is common knowledge that populism is a vaunted but at the same time little-known notion in Turkey in terms of its background. It is one of the six fundamental principles, also shown by six arrows on the party flag, of the Republican People's Party (Cu*mhuriyet Halk Partisi)* which were formulated in 1931 and officially entered the Turkish constitution in 1937. Populism became a central element in the ideological discourse of the young republic and a principle emphasized by every segment of the political spectrum from right to left. However, according to Asım Karaömerlioğlu (2001), even though the concept is well used in Turkey, the definition of populism could not reach beyond the typical description, often not enough discussed, that this state eventually has created ambiguous explanations in the literature.

Karaömerlioğlu (2001) further argues that this is not only applicable for Turkey but also other countries that have a similar case. The reason behind this lies in various perceptions of populism ranging from Russia and the USA Latin America even differs and thus, it is difficult to form theoretical completeness. In the last decade or so, decent ink has been spent on populism by several pundits that the appearance of concept has been unfolding its wings and it became more visible in academic literature. However, we can still argue that much of the papers have tackled the issue with an approach on the concept of populism, which sees populism as a disturbing deviation, a derivative of the representative of the democratic liberal model. This slogan is often used by most world leaders, political elites, and as well as ordinary citizens to label opponent or incumbent governments while it is seen fairly in all sorts of media outlets. This paper is not aiming to answer the motives behind

this tendency; however, it can well prove the cause of the Turkish case that populism in the Turkish language has two distinct equivalents: "*halkçılık*" and "*popülizm*" (Baykan, 2017).

Furthermore, when we retrospect, particularly 1930s, we see a description of populism in the program of the Republican People's Party that is explained as follows:

> The source of willpower and sovereignty is the nation. The use of this willpower and sovereignty to regulate the fulfilment of the reciprocal duties of the state to the citizen and the citizen to the state is a great principle for the party. We consider individuals who accept absolute equality before the laws and do not give privileges to any individual, no family, no class, no community, as from the public and populist (Cop, 2016).

Besides, as with many other concepts, populism is not an intellectual and political phenomenon that came to the agenda for the first time in the Republican period. In fact, on the contrary, some traces of populism can be explicitly found during the late Ottoman Empire period, particularly, throughout this period leading up to the 1908 revolution (Çay, 2019). Meanwhile, it was seen that the Young Turks (*Jeune Turc*) made earnest efforts to bring the people to the center of their ideas to legitimize themselves and their actions against the Abdulhamid regime. The Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, ITC*), represented by Young Turks, was the most crucial social and political movement in the last few decades of Ottoman history.

Moreover, Young Turks are the common name of the Ottoman intellectuals who set off with ideas such as setting up a system that based on a constitutional basis in the second half of the 19th century within the Ottoman Empire, holding free elections with the declaration of Kanun-i Esasi and thus, delivering the future of the country to the parliament to be constituted and Western example was chosen to reach as the target. On the other hand, there has been noteworthy progress that (*Jeune Turc)* 'Young Turks' have reached, and they initiated a liberal critique of government activity and a legitimate program among secret committees and thinkers who gathered in Cairo, Paris, and Geneva, followed by the university students (Berkes, 2015).

Young Turks eventually have made considerable networks and influence in various parts of Balkan countries that Thessaloniki gained significant power in the military. In addition to that Thessaloniki had become one of the Ottoman Empire's political and intellectual centers after 1908 up until the empire had lost control of it and the center of the Committee of Union and Progress, the most important political organization of the period, was in Thessaloniki until it moved to Istanbul in 1912 (Doğan, 2019). This led to uprisings against the regime that military officers seized the government building in Thessaloniki and revolted against the Sultan Abdülhamid the II and failure of putting down revolts eventually has forced the Sultan to agree demands of Young Turks (Gürhanlı, 2020).

The Second Constitutional Era coincides with a turning point in the history of Turkish thought (Haspolat, 2011). It has played a key and leading role in many aspects of late Ottoman intellectual life including the enlargement of political liberties, publication of new magazines, and foundation of new associations that alongside the period, first political parties have set up, many associations were set up, and printing activities in a safe environment have become possible. In this regard, the number of publications in magazines and newspapers has increased quite significantly. For instance, in the

years between 1908 and 1909 altogether 353 magazines and newspapers were published for the usage of readers (Toprak, 2013).

Furthermore, the range of magazines was remarkably produced and gave wide coverage to many issues from traditional and modern versions of Islam to socialism, and materialism. For example, “Islam Magazine” (İslam Mecmuası), published in 1915, covered not only matters related to religion but also education, morality, and economics. Writers of the magazine, Ziya Gökalp was among them, endorsed “national economy” (milli iktisat) and “national capital” (milli sermaye) while having praised the growing power of Russian Muslim bourgeois. Parallel to that, a magazine named “Participation” (İştirak) supported socialism on the other hand “Philosophy Magazine” (Felsefe Mecmuası) was offering broad coverage to biological materialism (Toprak, 2013). Therefore, it is safe to draw a conclusion that the Second Constitutional Era has brought intellectual depth to the late Ottoman period.

In this sense, both the movements of thought that would have an effect in the Ottoman Constitutional Period and all these movements inherited to the Republic (Cop, 2016) through the Ottoman Empire that it had the opportunity to develop and disseminate in an independent environment created by the Second Constitutional Era. Therefore, the emergence of populism in the Ottoman Empire is linked to the emergence of the Young Turks as a new intellectual class. Because the Westernized intellectual of the Tanzimat, which was the predecessor of Meşrutiyet, was not socialist, but individualist, and from their point of view, it was not society that would be enlightened by the modern civilization of the West, only people (Haspolat, 2011). In the history of Ottoman / Turkish thought the idea of populism, which was effective in both the Committee of Union and Progress and the Republic period, has appeared based on two main resources.

The first of these is the Narodnik movement, the anti-Tsarist Russian middle-class revolutionary act at the end of the 19th century. The Narodnik movement, which advocates a non-Marxist type of socialism, was brought to the Ottoman lands by Russian origin Turkic intellectuals that according to Odabaşı (2005) it is not simple to infer exactly when Russian populism influence on the Ottoman / Turkish intellectual world has begun, but its first marks have emerged at least from the early 1890s and intensified over time. To summarize, Narodnism means that capitalist relations enter an agrarian society with a delay compared to Western Europe where much of the population consists of peasantry. Narodnik was born in an environment where this rapid capitalization process threatened expropriation and destruction for the lower segments of society, but where agricultural (precapitalist) structures did not dissolve as rapidly as in Western Europe and resisted for a long time. The Russian Populism, which emerged with understanding and mode of action, protected the small producer peasantry, which lost its land to rich farmers day by day and therefore has become increasingly impoverished and called them to revolt against Tsarism for the revolution to take place (Haspolat, 2011). With this content, "The Populism Movement, which aims to mutiny the peasants in order to overthrow the Tsarist Regime and save the country", was one of the fundamental movements that affected the social struggle in Russia until 1885, although it failed (Odabaşı, 2007).

According to Berkes (1975), Turkish intellectuals were subjected to a sprinkling of Narodnik ideas that Narodnism entered the Turkish intellectuals through three channels. One of them is the Balkan and

especially the Bulgarian intellectuals, another channel mentioned by Berkes is the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party, which was founded in 1887 under the strong influence of Narodnik ideas by Caucasian Armenian intellectuals who studied in France and the third way Narodnik flows among Turkish intellectuals that migrating from Russia that Hüseyinzâde Ali, Akçuraoğlu Yusuf, and Ağaoğlu Ahmet Beyler were the prominent figures of these intellectuals who met nationalist, Panslavist, Narodnik and Socialist ideas in Russia. On the other hand, although the Narodnik movement dominated for a fleeting time after the Second Constitutional Era, the Young Turks adopted Solidarism. The main motive behind the adoption of Solidarism was its rejection of the conflict of social classes and its view of the people as one class (Çay, 2020).

Like Narodnik, the Ottoman intelligentsia who gathered around "Turkish hearths" (Türk Ocakları) determined countless targets among others "journey to the people" and enlighten them. Exclusively, a magazine titled "Toward People" (Halka Doğru), published by Turkish hearths in 1913, ensured a convenient platform to propagate such aims. The leading writers including Yusuf Akçura, Hüseyinzade Ali, Ziya Gökalp, and Halide Edip (Adıvar) have underlined the urgency of a journey to the people. Akçura has put a particular emphasis on the necessity of education of people and wrote that: "in order for the people, namely peasants and tradesmen, to establish schools and societies, there is a need for educated men who will come before them and guide them"[6] (Cited in Toprak, 1984, p.71). Akin to that, Turk Yurdu (Turkish Motherland) magazine, published by Turk Yurdu Cemiyeti (Turkish Motherland Association) in 1911 advocated journey to the people and encouraged intellectuals to go to rural areas and villages. For such purposes, conferences and discussion programs are being organized (Toprak, 2013, p.172-173). Thus, rural settlements and villages in Anatolia have attained a level of symbolic places of purity and national values were being sought in such places (Toprak, 1984, p.15-21).

Zafer Toprak pays decent attention to Solidarism[8] that it tends to be a dominant ideology in the late Ottoman/Early Republic period after 1908. According to Solidarists, liberalism denies justice; socialism denies freedom that is one of the main goals Solidarism, to reconcile these two trends. Unlike Russian Narodnik, for example, Turkish Populism has been nationalist from the beginning.

Conclusion

There has been a significant alteration when it comes to an understanding and the practice of populism from the late Ottoman era to the early Turkish Republic. Through the Second Constitutional Era, peasantry and lower classes have attracted the central interest of the Ottoman intellectuals due to the consideration of the lifestyle of peasants as pure and spiritually rich. However, along with the War of Independence in the second decade of the 20th century and thereafter, the middle classes have caught the focus and those groups came into prominence instead of the lower classes. The motive behind this cannot be fully understood without considering the growing demand for the national economy and nationalization processes in every aspect. Hence, throughout the 1920s, the existence of the middle classes was considered more proper, and it was necessary for the construction of the nation-state. However, there is no room for claiming that the peasantry lost its entire attention in the eyes of intellectuals of a given era. On the other hand, rustics and lower classes were heavily praised but it

remained only on the rhetorical level. As Gökalp's solidaristic philosophy was adopted by the republican regime and its elites, therefore, it was beneficial rhetoric to conceal profound divisions of classes.

Briefly, the study discussed the evolution of populism-qua-halkçılık from 1908 to the 1920s. The findings suggest that the similarities between Russian populism and the Second Constitutional Era populism-qua-halkçılık are laying in the pre-capitalist structure of Russia and the Ottoman Empire. In Russia, feudalism began to loosen after the abolition of serfdom by 1861 though the living standards of peasants worsened. Hence, Russian intellectuals appeared and claimed that they can solve the problems of the peasantry. On one hand, it was offered the enrichment of "traditional agricultural structure," on the other hand, industrialization without capitalism was seen as the only solution (Başkaya, 2012, p.260-61). Russian intellectuals also had various aims such as the journey to the people and enlightenment of peasants. Similar arguments were put forward by Ottoman intellectuals as well. Leading magazines of Türk Yurdu and Halka Doğru grasped many discussions in terms of encouraging intellectuals to go to villages and rural areas to educate people. Thus, Russian Narodnik's heavy influence on the Second Constitutional Era populism-qua-halkçılık is quite inconvenient to deny.

Consequently, the authors propose that populism in Turkey could not be clearly grasped without an elaborated historical analysis of populism-qua-halkçılık. While this study does not offer a conclusive answer to the question of how understanding and the practice of populism changed from the late Ottoman era to the early Turkish Republic, it certainly raises important questions and encourages further research in the field.

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Political Polarisation: A Revisited Concept

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Abstract

Increasingly divisive politics taking hold in many countries worldwide is often associated with a rise in populism, reinvigorated nationalism, and post-truth politics. However, we can better represent these labels through their effects: 'political polarisation'. This paper offers a new concept of polarisation that reveals power dynamics by combining insights from both governmentality studies and the concept of antagonism. First, the paper will show two limitations of existing conceptualisations of polarisation. Then, it will offer an alternative approach that focuses on three attributes of polarised politics: the visible interactions between antagonistic discourses, the logic behind politics, and the formation of the polarised subject.

Keywords: polarised politics, political logic, polarised subjectivity, political polarisation, technology of power

Introduction

In this conference paper, I critique some definitions of political polarisation and offer a new concept of it. First, I will show some limitations of such definitions, providing an alternative approach that focuses on three attributes of polarised politics: the visible interactions between antagonistic discourses, the logic behind politics, and the formation of the polarised subject. In doing so, I propose a new concept able to reveal polarisation dynamics and the mechanism of reproduction.

Perspectives of Polarisation

The concept of 'political polarisation' can be traced back to Sartori's definition. According to Sartori (1976), 'polarisation occurs when we have ideological distance because political groups see themselves as mutually exclusive or incapable of joining forces, which he describes as the prevalence of centrifugal forces triggering groups to abandon the middle ground. The result is that any consensus on fundamental issues is not possible. In this way, political polarisation has mainly been about the extent of disagreement about policy choices and political preferences, ranged between a pre-existing continuum of alternatives from Left to Right wing.

Two prominent areas of research that fall within this conceptualisation of polarisation are Partisan polarisation and Attitude polarisation. *Partisan polarisation* focuses on political parties playing a role in convincing and mobilising groups to support one particular policy or ideology. From this perspective, politicians rather than ordinary citizens are polarised because of ideological identity; so, attention goes to how the distribution of ideology has moved apart. For example, Fiorina, Abrams and Pope (2011) have suggested that polarisation entails merely rhetorical confrontation among political actors. They argue that while the political elites polarise, the electorate may remain less polarised. To Fiorina and Abrams, mass polarisation refers to the attitudes of the mass public towards elite polarisation, and they argue that the media over-reports polarisation. However, as Abramowitz and Saunders argue, "divisions are not confined to a small minority of elected officials and activists—they involve a large segment of the public, and they are likely to increase in the future". Their research is an example of the second kind of research, *Attitude polarisation,* which focuses on properties of public disagreement (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996). In this kind of research, attention is paid to the extent to which people consistently align themselves with one side or another in the political spectrum; so, attention goes to political attitudes and how social characteristics such as class and ethnic divisions induce alignment between two opposite groups.

These research areas share a two-dimensional perspective that characterises polarisation as the result of either ideological or social distance between groups regarding issues that have been deployed to increase support for a particular political project. In consequence, the standard deviation of preferences is the common measure of polarisation, but this measure falls short in distinguishing conflict within bipartisanship. Moreover, this measure does not consider power relations as the individual agent is at the centre of analysis, and in doing so, it does not consider the problem from a relational perspective.

More recently, Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes (2012) define polarisation based on the extent to which partisans view each other as a disliked outgroup, which they call "affective polarisation". Social identities particularly drive affective polarisation because they generate ingroup privilege and outgroup derogation. However, "affective polarisation' does not reveal the dynamics through which identities are reconstructed during political contestation. This definition considers identity as it was constituted and fixed outside of politics So, even though Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes are right to claim that social identities are important, they miss essential insights into political contestation.

A *relational approach* seems to do this by including both polarising rhetoric and its instrumental political utility. McCoy, Rahman and Somer define polarisation as "a process whereby the multiplicity of differences increasingly aligns along a single dimension, and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of "Us" versus "Them"" (2018, p.18). Conflict, on this view, emerges as the result of the other side doing wrong, never a result of my actions. McCoy and Rahman describe this process as "political discourse [that] is often reduced to language vilifying the opponent and reducing them to the 'inferior' other by stripping them of any morally redeemable quality in the contest of electoral politics" (2016, p. 6). Since the use of such language is frequently associated with racism and coloniality, it is necessary to characterise polarisation as confrontation. McCoy, Rahman and Somer (2018) argue that a characteristic of polarisation is its inherent relationality, understood as the group's processes for

creating coalitions. If the focus is the need to build a coalition, then political actors will utilise strategies and tools to unite their supporters and weaken their opponents. Notably, they argue that extreme polarisation occurs when politics turns into an existential struggle, although they do not identify why this happens beyond viewing it as a tactic of political actors using polarising rhetoric in a dynamic that self-reinforces polarisation. The relational approach explores the relationship between politics and individuals, but it does so by describing individuals as either manipulated or self-interested.

A multidimensional understanding of politics is needed; one that distinguishes between input and output politics. Within poststructuralists approaches, the Foucauldian concept of power as 'conduct of conduct', or governmentality, would be a more appropriate approach to do so. I pay attention to technologies of disciplinary power, including technologies of the self and related forms of knowledge to reveal power relations and make visible the processes of subjection and subjectivation. This attention is worth emphasising if we want to explain how and why politics becomes polarised.

A New Concept of Polarisation

I adopt a Foucauldian approach to the concept of government as 'conduct of conduct', which means "to 'lead' others and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities" (Foucault, 2000, p.341). 'To conduct' implies the configuration of 'discourses' or ways of explaining a particular socio-political order while establishing one specific mode of communicating about politics. This renders reality conceivable in such a manner that makes it governable. These discourses are intertwined with technologies of power or well-crafted practices to govern society.

As *a technology of power*, polarisation can be performed by a variety of actors and is governed by a broad, conscious end. It exhibits a rationality aimed at organising society by reducing the possibilities of alternative ways of thinking, speaking and doing politics in two options. Thus, as a technology of power, polarisation is part of the rationalities of government used to manage the population. The function of dividing, which characterises polarisation, allocates individuals to specific 'illegitimate' groups considered a threat to the survival of (the so-called) legitimate groups. As Palonen (2009) argues polarisation takes the shape of a 'bipolar hegemony', in which two groups demarcate the frontier between them, as part of an exclusive dynamic of power, which does not admit middle ground. The assumptions behind singular division between 'Us and Them' is based on who comprises the legitimate and illegitimate subjects, which defines who governs and who is governed.

Illegitimate subjects are given the role of governed. Any act of contestation by them is immediately presumed as violent and lacking any veracity. Challenging the illusion of peace, prosperity, liberty, reason, and progress, serves to expose their unreasonableness and perceived impossibility to be fully understood as subjects. This is similar to what Foucault observes as denying 'the other' person the attributes of a legitimate political agent, by placing them in the role of governed (Foucault, 2003). Moreover, identified as containing 'wrong' people, these groups become classified as threats to the social order or specific way of life that is sustained or justified as legitimate. We can see that this function is a part of a particular rationality that goes beyond mere political ideology or rhetoric; one that tries to

redefine the onto-epistemological basis for governing, bringing to the fore front epistemic struggles to define political subjects.

Therefore, polarisation refers not only to the extent of disagreement but also the allocation of populations in a foundationalist manner. That is, polarisation represents the refocusing of the political spectrum into a singular division of 'Us and Them' based on who comprises the legitimate and illegitimate subjects.

The logic of organising society into two groups becomes a perverse form of identity politics insofar as it only admits of two (broadly speaking) identities. In this respect, recognising this logic does not mean that claims of political identity are illegitimate and hence must be abandoned. Identity has value as a source of political engagement and self-affirmation for inclusionary citizenship, adding heterogeneity to membership (Sokoloff, 2015). However, polarisation seeks to shut down an inclusionary framework by establishing a system of exclusion in which 'the other is demonised'. This is executed by following a distinction between good and evil representing citizenship struggles as a moralising battle in which 'we are the legitimate people', rather than 'we are all legitimate people'. As a result, polarisation does not expand citizenship, but confines it to a representation of those able to act or not, thus, drawing the lines of political contestation and the ways to encounter it.

This theme of the relationship between polarisation and political identity, far from being an isolated political strategy, lies at the centre of governing. Since regimes of truth offer particular rationalities that suppose particular ways of being in the world, they also include technologies that enable individuals to recognise externally defined traits so that they can act upon themselves by learning and internalising these technologies – a way of managing their behaviour, speech, desires and so on. Thus, individuals develop an *ethos* or a particular way of being and feeling about the world. As Lorenzini describes it, "*under* every argument, every reasoning and every evidence there is always a certain assertion which … is rather a sort of commitment, of profession, and has the following form: 'If it is true, then I will submit; it is true, *therefore* I submit'" (author emphasis. 2016, p.68). In this way, the subject is required to re-examine their position in the world. However, as Hindess (2001, 2005) observes, this request is promoted as an effective way of dealing with the government of 'civilised' populations but is regarded as less appropriate in other cases seen as 'uncivilised'.

This last point suggests that the induction for the individual to act as an autonomous subject is differently shaped for legitimate and illegitimate subjects. Since the illegitimate subjects are given the role of governed, technologies of power try to impose on them a certain identity and their act of contestation is immediately presumed not only as violent but also lacking any veracity. How can they challenge a 'regime of truth'? Within the coordinates of 'truth', the only answer possible is that they are incapable of recognising 'the truth'. Challenging the illusion of peace, prosperity, liberty, reason, and progress, thus, serves to expose their unreason, the impossibility to be conceived fully as subjects (Fanon quoted by Ciccariello-Maher, 2010, pp. 4-5). When challenging the 'regime of truth', what is at stake is both the question of truth and of recognition of the 'other' as legitimate subject. Now, we can see "the possibility of the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think" (Foucault, 1984, p. 46); we can observe the scope of the conflict. If illegitimate subjects threaten a 'regime of truth', a legitimised form of state and society, the political manoeuvre is to control key spaces of power, such as the state, in order to codify, fix, consolidate and institutionalise what is considered legitimate. Thus, a 'state-

conquering agenda' becomes important. As Bob Jessop argues, state power can be seen as both the contingent outcomes of practices and the means by which existing relations of power can be codified, fixed, consolidated and institutionalised (2007, p. 152). Hence, observing what is said, limiting the range of thoughts and behaviours in the conflict seems important as they serve as pillars for preserving and fortifying contemporaneous power relations: a hegemonic orientation. This recognition of calculation, prediction of risks, and forms of anticipatory governance help us to understand polarisation beyond ideological distance and more as a political rationality to govern, which tends to erase the citizenship struggle to define itself as moral struggle.

To characterise politics as polarised or not, we must move beyond how both sides engage in rivalry: how conflict is invoked, by whom, and with what purpose and effect. Rather than looking only at the level of behaviour and preference along the horizontal ideological line of Right and Left, an understanding of polarised politics must be able to offer an account of this complex dynamic between subjectivity, truth and power. In other words, it must be able to make visible that which is (and is not) limiting the range of thoughts, behaviour, and subjectivities that are valid with regard to the procedures of manifestation of truth. Thus, we can characterise politics as polarised when the three following attributes are simultaneously present:

a) The visible interactions between antagonistic discourses, which refers to what is being contested and the extent of disagreement.

b) The hegemonic logic behind politics, which does not merely result in the articulation of discourses, but also in the intrinsic rationality of governing.

c) The formation of the polarised subject, which brings the agency of actors into the conflict. Political conflict does not occur merely between political groups, as if these identities were constituted outside the conflict; it also implies dynamics in which identities are (re)constructed both within and as a necessary part of the conflict.

Determining the Visible Interaction between Antagonistic Discourses

The first constitutive dimension to focus on are the core concepts being contested, which are central to, and constitutive of, a particular "political thinking" that gives inspiration and identity. These concepts are part of assemblages of authority, truth, and knowledge that attempt to fix meanings and rationalities that support an encompassing vision of the world, or a 'common sense', to use Gramsci's term.

There is no political stability but rather permanent contingency. The structuration of power is never fully completed but is an ongoing process. Now, we can see a bigger picture of the conflict –one in which the two groups do not simply disagree about policies; instead, there is a real possibility of antagonism. Antagonism matters for this conceptualisation because it reveals an effective critique of power relations. Once antagonism is revealed, not only are mentalities being contested but new discourses and technologies of power also emerge to reinforce or reject the 'common sense'. In short, the concept of antagonism allows us to observe a frontier dividing two sides and to identify the conflictual character of

what is in dispute. But we need another concept with which to examine politics. It is the concept of logic that enables us to observe how politics is being performed.

Determining the Logic Behind Politics

To determine the logic behind politics, we need to qualify how the encounter with antagonism is experienced. Chantal Mouffe offers two ways: the logic of antagonism and the logic of agonism. The logic of antagonism is a distinction of friend/enemy (Mouffe, 2005, p. 14), in which two sides are represented as enemies who do not share any ground. Viewed as such, the logic of antagonism reproduces a 'war' model by taking the representation of a desirable state of affairs under threat. The logic of agonism is different; it is a relation in which the conflicting parties recognise the legitimacy of their opponents. Thus, instead of a war model between enemies, there is a model of conflict between adversaries. So, conflict is recognised between two opposing parts, but dealing with the conflict does not necessarily lead to a logic of antagonism.

When politics is reduced to a logic of antagonism, it embraces a dynamic that reduces the complexities of power to simplistic relations between 'good and bad. Following this kind of logic, the source of the conflict is one side lacking a positive identity, such as being reasonable or civilised. In this way, the logic of antagonism constrains the possibilities for thinking about multiple ways to reconfigure politics. Indeed, the formation of 'Us', not 'Them', is created to exhibit zero-sum rationality aimed at occupying strategic positions to recreate and reproduce power. We can see this when any new discourse emerging in the conflict is reduced to one or the other side, and the only exit to the conflict is victory or defeat.

However, if the logic behind politics enables us to detect the complexities and relational dynamics involved in the conflict and the specificity of different strategies of power, it is the formation of the subject as an enemy which complements our definition of polarised politics.

Determining the Formation of The Polarised Subject

The creation of ourselves as polarised subjects allows us to see people as agents and the effects of the orientation to politics. Technologies of ‘self’ are useful. Accordingly, a subject arises through various modes of 'subjectivation' or ‘the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subjectivity’ (Davidson, 2016, p. 59). This experience is possible because subjects require some truth for living. There is no essentialist definition of the subject; rather, subjectivity is an activity, a practice of the self, or an exercise (Eribon, 2014, p. 78). Moreover, to Foucault, the subject is a “subject who is fighting a war” (2003, p. 54) because a subject does not exist without undergoing a process of subjectivation. Individuals experience a frontier between the self and “the other”, not only under rationalities of rule but also under “emotionality of rule” (Campbell, 2010, p. 41). When individuals have to give meaning to what they believe, including themselves. Political identification is no longer about what individuals consider as ‘truth’ but about defending their ‘truth’ and convincing others that it is ‘the true truth’. Moreover, political identities are recreated and transformed within the conflict. A new subjectivity that distinguishes between friends and enemies, results in the purpose of winning the war.

Conclusion

The point of all these dimensions of polarised politics is the forming of a set of practices and a regime of truth that seeks to submit differences to the division between two sides. Behind this black and white perspective, there is a mechanism of the formation of truth that has been established as a norm, frequently leading to the blaming of one or the other side of the conflict.

Positioning of one side as being the fundamental problem not only reinforces regimes that qualify some individuals as 'problem' and others as 'normal' but also masks the complex roots of any conflict. In other words, those qualified as guilty and dangerous, usually Black and other people subject to race or caste oppression, remain excluded. Thus, instead of imposing a binary epistemology that does not help overcome the dynamics that polarisation produces, I have developed a revisited concept by focusing on three dimensions:

The visible interactions between antagonistic discourses

The hegemonic logic behind politics

The formation of the polarised subject

A concept of polarisation should appropriately equip scholars to explain the phenomenon, which is where the analytical power of my conceptual exercise emerges. In particular, by focusing on the three dimensions, it is possible to assess whether politics become polarised. In this respect, the formation of bimodal distribution in the social structure supporting political groups and the formation of discourses "Us and Them" are not enough to explain polarisation. As I have suggested, politics become polarised when the subject's appearance as an enemy is visible. Despite the propensity of populist discourses, for example, to evolve into polarisation, individuals may not evolve into polarised subjects if, as a society, we are alert to recognising the logic of war even without military violence. That also means that groups can contest political ideas, and there is still the possibility of competition between two opposing views. Still, we are alert to uphold an ethical sensibility to welcome difference and dialogue. In this way, we are also more prepared to deal with polarisation since we recognise the need for a peacebuilding process acceptable for the two opposing views without blaming the other.

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Corruption as a rhetorical strategy of the populist parties. Case study: The 2020 electoral campaign for the Romanian Parliament of The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians

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Abstract

Corruption is linked to populism and populist politicians in two ways. First of all, persistent political corruption is among the societal problems that contribute to a negative change in social optics regarding political life and political representatives. It is claimed that the more corrupt a society is or is perceived as being, the more exposed it is to the risk of populism. Second of all, corruption is often times used by populist politicians as a rhetorical strategy to delegitimise and cast out their political opponents. Corruption as a populist rhetoric has several particularities such as promoting an "us versus them" mentality alongside Manichean views, as well as pushing constant claims of election fraud. My paper aims to analyse these particularities following the case study of a newly elected party, The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) and its rhetorical strategy during the 2020 political campaign for the Romanian Parliament. AUR's right-wing populism is founded on the values of the traditional family, patriotism, Christianity, freedom and the union with the Republic of Moldova and proved to be appealing to 9% of the voters – a percentage that was not properly foreseen by the polls before elections. As AUR's campaign strategy focused mainly on advertising through social media pages, my research focuses on the content delivered between November 6th and December 5th of 2020 by the AUR candidates who obtained a Parliament seat, in order to determine how consistent with the theoretical framework of populist rhetoric their approach of the topic of corruption was, and what particularities it might have possessed.

Keywords: corruption, populism, AUR party, Romania

Both corruption and populism have gained a lot of public attention at different stages in past decades, transcending academic talks and public policy to become topics the citizenry are sensitive about. Due to the extensive manner in which they have been addressed, though many times being wrongly defined or misused, both corruption and populism have become buzzwords (Harrison, 2007, p. 674; Mudde, 2018, p. 1668). In European Countries such as Romania, the rise of anti-corruption rhetoric has first taken place by the end of the 1990s and it has been strongly linked with the transition to democracy and its consolidation. Controlling corruption through prevention, sanctioning and education has become a

mandatory criterion for good governance and one of the main requirements for the EU accession (Nicholson, 2004). So, it was very common in the beginning of the 2000s for anti-corruption to be part of the political agenda, partly due to the pressure put by international organizations, such as the World Bank and the EU (Engler, 2020, p. 2). Adding to that, there were growing demands from an emerging national civil society which understood the importance of countering the issue in order to support the democratic reforms. Even after the EU accession, corruption has remained part of the political rhetoric, both because of the persistent scandals and the continued existence of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, established by the EU to ongoingly assess Romania's progress in countering corruption. For the purpose of this paper, I consider the most commonly accepted definition of corruption which is "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain" (Transparency International, 2009, 14).

On the other hand, populism has regained popularity in these past few years due to growing Euroscepticism and a number of socio-economic challenges. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018) define populism as a set of ideas which depict society as divided between the pure people and the corrupt elite, as well as its claim that popular sovereignty should be the main purpose in politics. The authors also define populism as being akin to a thin-centred ideology, a belief system, attached to other ideologies (p. 1669), which perfectly applies to the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, as I later argue. Considering this party's example, populism cannot be addressed as a mere political strategy (Kazin, 1995 as cited in Boatright, 2020, p. 179). The ideational approach Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018) embrace is more suitable, but for the purpose of this paper I only consider a part of the populist rhetorical style: the way in which AUR approaches corruption in terms of content and their purpose.

Beyond any definition, the connection between the two phenomena can be approached in either a rhetorical sense or in a more complex socio-political determinism. In terms of determinism, for instance, the position of Transparency International (2019) on the matter is that corruption and populism may feed one another. That is because corruption among the political elites is systematically speculated by populist politicians to the point in which they may delegitimise the democratic institutions which are responsible for preventing or fighting corruption. The chain of causality works this way: Populist politicians disseminate the message that political elites only serve themselves and act against the people, while portraying themselves as the saviours of the people (pp. 3-4). Thus, according to Boatright (2020), they like to take advantage of circumstances that increase public anxiety towards a matter, in this case using corruption as a pretext (p. 176), in order to determine people to provide support for their populist political program and even to mask their own corrupt acts. The strategy of accusing political elites and state bureaucrats of corruption is usually successful due to the gap they sometimes create between themselves and the public. Populism takes advantage of this gap and exacerbates the lack of trust in public institutions. The poor performance of these institutions is what motivates the voters to choose populist politicians with the false hope of less corruption (pp. 180-181). Once in power, some populists who first tried to separate themselves from previous policies, continue down the path drawn by the former elites because they may not have a comprehensive political program. Those who have such a program but do not succeed in implementing it blame their lack of control to lingering subversive, corrupt figures who have supposedly seized the institutions. Populist politicians are rarely less corrupt and once elected, their discourse on the matter may change focus to normalizing the practice, which is the real threat to democracy (p. 181). Surprisingly, the open manner, even with a false moral conscience,

in which populist politicians exercise clientelism and corruption makes their reputation suffer less than expected. The explanation may be the relativization of corruption. Müller (2016) argues that populists do not frame corruption as a genuine problem as long as it is pursued for an alleged greater purpose, which is the interest of the people (pp. 47-48).

In short, this is how corruption and populism are interlinked and perpetuated: corruption and bad governance fuel mistrust in democratic institutions which is then used by the populists to push their agenda forward. Once in power, the populist politicians rarely counter corruption and may even increase it instead (Transparency International, 2019, p. 9). There are a number of studies carried out in order to sociologically validate this determinism. For instance, Hawkins et al. (2019) concluded upon a moderately strong relationship between corruption and rising populism in a way in which corruption may facilitate the emergence of populist leaders in some places, but it is not the only contributing factor. It only adds to some other causes such as economic privations or cultural backlash (p. 10).

In terms of rhetoric, the relation between populism and corruption is firstly depicted in the core of the populist worldview which antagonises the pure people and the corrupt elites in a moralistic, Manichean way (Geurkink et. al. 2020, p. 248). Corruption is a recurrent topic populist politicians use, but Meijers and Zaslove (2021) argue that populists do not necessary aim to fight corruption in its literal sense (p. 376). Thus, in the last part of the paper I analyse the particularities of AUR's 2020 political campaign for the Romanian Parliament, aiming to determine whether their approach to anti-corruption generally falls in the anti-elite and Manichean patterns or if there are any other policies involved and if so, the manner in which their approach intends to tackle corruption. Apart from that, anti-corruption rhetoric is not necessarily particular to populism. As Engler (2020) claims, there are two narratives of anti-corruption: the populist narrative, which uses corruption for anti-establishment intended purposes and the good governance narrative, which approaches corruption in a programmatic, policy manner (p. 14). A similar analysis is supported by Boatright (2020) who argues that in democratic states, the corruption rhetoric has two main functions: either to "delegitimise or cast out" or raise awareness towards a change in behaviour and institutions (p. 176).

Engler's theory is that the anti-corruption rhetoric has gained new attention with the rise of populism making it a tool to strengthen anti-establishment claims (2020). However, if anti-corruption rhetoric may be correlated to some degree of populism in Western countries, in the Eastern European countries there is a different situation. That is particularly the historical context of post-totalitarian transition to democracy. In Romania, as well as in other Eastern European countries, the increased anti-corruption rhetoric among political parties is more likely connected with the intention to prove to their voters their capability to positively respond to the EU requirements. Thus, anti-corruption is still used to validate the liberal and democratic intentions of most of the parties (Engler, 2020, p. 2). The results of Engler's study reflects a strong corelation between the anti-corruption rhetoric and anti-establishment rhetoric except for Eastern Europe, where the anti-corruption rhetoric also tends to be elevated in other parties, with no differentiation on the matter of how radical they are on the left or right of the political spectrum (p. 8).

The context of anti-corruption rhetoric in Romania

In Romania anti-corruption rhetoric has gained a central spot on the political agenda with the 2004 presidential elections and has remained a hot topic in politics, although I would say that it has been more prevalent with parties that are not typically regarded as populist - usually liberal-right and pro-European. It is, however, debatable whether these parties have always had a clean, good-governance-based approach to anti-corruption. Beyond policy matters, corruption allegations and scandals have been constantly used as a strategy to delegitimize political opponents, many times framed as an "us versus them" approach. Back in 2004, all the centre-right opposition parties gathered in an alliance called "Justice and Truth" to support Traian Băsescu's presidential candidacy, after his college's sudden withdrawal. His campaign relied a lot on anti-corruption, both to address the international pressure to counter it, as Romania was preparing for its EU accession, and to oppose the systemic corruption of the previous Social-Democrat government led by his opponent Adrian Năstase. Băsescu invoked political clientelism and election fraud and eventually managed to win the next two presidential elections. His mandates were, however, filled with accusations and convictions for corruption among his party members. Adding to that, allegations of manipulation of the government through his cronies provided the opposition with arguments to organize the presidential impeachment referendum. Some controversial declarations Băsescu made during the electoral campaigns, such as being willing to execute any minister suspected of corruption (Shafir, 2008, p. 454), only for links to be discovered between Basescu's brother and the organized crime disillusioned voters (Dragoman, 2020, p. 4). Addressing neo-populism, Shafir (2008) argued that Basescu would have fit into soft populism because he embraced and promoted the popular perception that the established parties were corrupt and acted against the people, which was a challenge to the party system (2008, p. 466).

Corruption scandals, as well as the overlap of his second mandate with the 2007-2009 Great Recession which led to cuts in public expenditures including wages, added to The Democrat-Liberal Party's (PDL) drop in popularity (Dragoman, 2020, p. 8), which eventually led to its dissolution and winning of the 2012 local and parliamentary elections by the Social-Democrats. By 2016, a new player, The Union Save Romania Party (USR) has gained popularity after shifting from a civic movement to a political party. Its popularity among young people has also been encouraged because of the tragedy which took place at the Colectiv nightclub and consequently, by the rise of the anti-corruption civic movement called #Rezist, which advocated against the old political class and its corrupt practices. In spite of that, the Social-Democrats (PSD) won the 2016 elections but faced backlash in 2017 after some controversial laws which targeted the judiciary system and meant to erase abuse of power from the criminal code, as well as to grant amnesty to some corruption charges (p. 8). The 2019 conviction for corruption of the party's president, Liviu Dragnea, made the following presidential, euro-parliamentary and local elections to gravitate again around the topic of anti-corruption. Meanwhile, many of the former members of Băsescu's party were absorbed by the National Liberal Party (PNL), their former allies in 2004, as well as the former allies of the PSD in 2012. As a result, in 2019, USR succeeded in the local and euro-parliamentary elections mainly due to their highly aggressive anti-corruption rhetoric directed against the PSD, particularly. Their campaign, "No criminals in public offices", was backed by national-liberal president, Klaus Iohannis, who even organized a referendum in 2019, very close to the elections for the European Parliament. The referendum addressed two issues, to prohibit changing the judiciary and

criminal law by emergency ordinances issued by the government and the granting of pardons or amnesties for the corrupt. The referendum received wide popular support which also implied political capital for both PNL and USR, which joined forces and managed to form a government last year.

Over time, every new political crisis filed with corruption scandals also led to a rise in populist parties. The post-revolutionary populism in Romania dates back to 1991 with the funding of Corneliu Vadim Tudor's The Greater Romania Party (PRM). It combined anti-Western, nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric to express opposition towards Romania's accession to the EU, which it later accepted (p. 7). Its popularity peaked in 2000 when it managed to win a great number of parliamentary seats and Vadim Tudor lost by a whisker to Ion Iliescu in the presidential elections. PRM's decline determined part of its electorate to shift to other new populist parties. The New Generation Party (PNG) gained popularity in 2008 in the context of economic crisis,but faced decline very shortly only to leave room for Dan Diaconescu People's Party (PP-DD). In 2012, PP-DD managed to win enough seats in the Romanian Parliament to position itself as the third biggest political force, with almost 14% of the votes (p. 8). After its leader's criminal conviction, it dissolved only to be absorbed by another party. None of these parties, widely regarded as populist, based their campaigns on anti-corruption issues as much as the pro-European parties have done, and none of them succeeded in having the same impact when using corruption as a pretext to delegitimize political opponents.

The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians' ascension and its anti-corruption rhetoric

The 2019 PSD political crisis and the COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in the rise of Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, which succeeded to win 9% of the seats in the Romanian Parliament in the 2020 elections. Considering the criteria proposed by Meijers and Zaslove (2021) in their approach to measure populism in political parties using expert surveys (pp. 382-384), AUR generally fits into the right-wing populism description due to its conservatism and nativism. According to AUR's political program, they oppose the political forces seeking to "relinquish Romanian sovereignty". The Manichean approach is more evident in their rhetoric, as they do not shy from calling themselves an anti-system party, which fights the politicians who are considered "traitors of our nation". They also oppose what they call "contemporary Marxism" and its implications, such as political correctness, gender ideology and multiculturalism, which are perceived as threats to national values. From AUR's perspective, the populist particularities of "indivisible people", "general will" and "people centrism", proposed by Meijers and Zaslove, are represented by the idea of nation. The nation relies, according to AUR, on the Romanian language, ethnicity, past memory and Christian-Orthodox faith. They also consider themselves the voice of the unionist movement with the Republic of Moldova, as well as the voice of the large Romanian diaspora. Their concept of elitism is, however, reversed, as they consider themselves to be the elite – a group of young, educated and competent people - part of them returning from abroad to act as saviours of the country. Through this, they seem to intend to re-create the romantic image of the 19th century politicians who built modern Romania after they had come back from the West. This is probably why their Euroscepticism is limited. They reject the idea of a federal Europe that would imply hegemony but adhere to the fact that Romania belongs to Europe, though understood more through its past western

values. Consequently, their “anti-elite” perspective is framed more as “anti-usurper”, addressing the average Romanian’s preference for a firm leadership who takes responsibility for all (Inglehart et al., 2014, p. 358). On an economic level, they support state protectionism of natural resources, while, paradoxically, not wanting the state to involve itself in the market economy. This supports the Laclauian argument that populism absorbs ideas from the left and right as it sees fit. Their weak ideology is precisely reflected in a long list of ideological paradoxes within their political program. Thus, in terms of ideological views, they seem to randomly embrace only the ones which serve to advance Romanian exceptionalism. AUR assumes a role to revive this exceptionalism and fight what they consider to pose a threat to it: anti-traditionalists, immigration, Magyar irredentism, the corrupt and illegitimate political class etc.

The case study grounds itself on the conclusions drawn from qualitative research, mainly based on discourse and content analysis. I have taken into consideration only the corruption related topics as they have been approached by the political candidates of AUR during the electoral campaign for the Romanian Parliament. The main source of information was their social media content, namely the official Facebook pages of each AUR political candidate. The monitoring and analysis have been realized based on both the written and video content, covering the time frame between November 6th and December 5th, 2020. The decision to rely on social media content only comes as a result of the party’s access to mainstream media being limited, whereas their presence in local media and few national broadcasts has generally just been shared by their social media pages. In fact, AUR’s entire political campaign was designed and delivered via Facebook, using tens of pages intended for each Romanian region and for every other country where there is a consistent Romanian emigration.

In order to avoid content overlap, I have taken into account only the winning candidates’ official pages. The paper also includes the conclusions drawn from content belonging to two former AUR members who eventually have left or have been excluded from the party during the first months of their mandate. Out of 46 Facebook personal pages verified during the monitoring, 19 pages have been active during the political campaign. Among the other 27, all except one were created mostly in January, only after the elections results were validated and the winning candidates were confirmed. 15 out of 19 political candidates broached the topic of corruption in their speeches during the campaign.

After comparing the observations collected from all the candidates, the results pointed toward 6 manners in which corruption was reflected in their speech, 5 being directly related to corruption offences and one being a meta-approach, reflecting the Manichean perspective. They all fit the theoretical framework proposed by Boatright and Engler about using corruption as an anti-establishment rhetorical strategy, rather than its policy implications. First is clientelism which covers the accusations directed against the other parties for appointing cronies in favourable management offices, in public institutions and other state bodies, as well as trying to exercise control over them and even over the judiciary. It has been claimed many times by AUR candidates that the traditional parties are abusing their power over the administration. De-politization of state institutions is one of the priorities of AUR’s political program, which lacks consistency and actual solutions. Directly related to clientelism is nepotism/ cronyism, supposedly promoted by the current politicians. Unlike the general accusation of clientelism, this was used against specific parties and political opponents, particularly USR. AUR’s opposition to USR has been apparent due to several accusations brought against the latter for allegedly being the “secret

services" party or that its members are the children of former Securitate officers who got boosted in politics or appointed in public offices as a result of their familial connections. Thirdly, we had the electoral fraud accusations which were approached similarly to other populist politicians' rhetoric in other countries. In all the cases where AUR accused others of electoral fraud the speech was shaped as to raise awareness among the voters and other AUR members who were acting as observers during the voting process in order for them to be vigilant because of an alleged conspiracy (supposedly orchestrated by the secret services) to steal the elections. A website called "nefura.ro" (translated by "they're stealing from us") was available during the election day. Evidently, both this and the rhetoric had a motivational purpose, which was to spark outrage against a corrupt system AUR wants to change. Theft and embezzlement of the state's natural resources was the fourth approach and a rather popular one among AUR candidates. It covered accusations against the political elites for being the political heirs of the 1990s politicians who were responsible for the post-communist privatization process, and who are now benefiting from the fortunes made out of illicit sales and bribery. It also covered the frequent direct accusations made against the political elites who continue to illegally sell Romania's natural resources. AUR particularly targeted the illegal wood selling and deforestation which has become a sensitive topic in Romania in the context of public agenda for dealing with climate change. The fifth topic was the conflict of interests which, unlike the others, was marginal, only made to accuse political counter-candidates of lack of integrity, and aimed particularly at a mayor, member of the Magyar political party. By Romanian legal framework, holding two public offices at once is called "incompatibility", a type of continuous conflict of interests of administrative nature. This is also a violation of public integrity laws which usually leads to interdiction to pursuit another public office for a certain amount of time. Thus, using accusations of conflict of interests stresses the illegitimacy of current politicians.

The sixth was a meta-approach to corruption and less of a topic and more of a general view. When building their arguments, AUR's corruption rhetoric was rather vague, used only to emphasise the "us versus them" – "patriots versus the corrupt" dichotomy which was directed against their political opponents in order to delegitimise them. During the political campaign, when addressing corruption, AUR candidates referred to politicians under different semantics such as: traitors, mafia, hypocrites who cover acts of corruption. Because of that, not only were many AUR political candidates distancing themselves from the political system, but still refuse to consider themselves politicians just because of their perspective that politicians cannot be anything other than endemically corrupt. Instead, they think of themselves as regular citizens who only act to remove the corrupt politicians in order to make room for technocrats. Thus, corruption allegations were meant to differentiate because if one member of the other parties is corrupt, the others are also corrupt by association (Boatright, 2020, p. 180). In AUR's rhetoric this is particularly evident when referring to Social-Democrats as the "red bourgeoise". Nowadays, corruption is typically associated with the communist legacy and the heirs of the communist party, which are PSD, making anti-corruption the replacer of anti-communism as a rhetorical strategy (Dragoman, 2020, pp. 5-6). Thus, using "red bourgeoise" equals both associating the party with the past-communist regime legacy and its corrupt practices and underlining their false pretences of representing the people's will when in fact they allegedly support the raw corrupt capitalist class.

Conclusions

AUR's anti-corruption rhetoric falls into the outlines drawn both by Boatright (2020) and Engler (2020). AUR has been using corruption as vaguely as possible so it makes it difficult to counteract. In fact, other than extending the borders of the phenomenon beyond its legal meaning, corruption remains a marginal topic on their agenda compared to unionism, protectionism over the natural resources or alleged threats to liberty in connection to COVID crisis measures, for instance. The language they used was simple and straightforward, playing with terms like "traitors" as a synonym for "the corrupt" which had more complex implications. The intention was probably to use moralistic language against the so-called corrupt elites, in order to generalise the problem as being a deeply systemic rooted issue, as Boatright argues (2020, p. 180). AUR's anti-corruption rhetoric was also used as an anti-establishment argument instead of an assessment tool for state efficiency, which is typical for populist parties as opposed to pro-European parties (Engler, 2020, p. 3). Although AUR addressed corruption both in its members' speeches and in its political program, it is not in a manner that proves their actual intention is to fix the issue. During the campaign they deliberately avoided policy implications and used corruption more as a tag. Concepts like rule of law, meritocracy, transparency were mentioned more in the political program than the members' speeches but were used rather as buzzwords. Instead, the tone of their discourse was accusatory and negative when it came to the problem of corruption. For further research, a review on whether AUR's approach on anti-corruption has suffered any changes during their parliamentary mandate may be needed. A more in-depth analysis of the ways in which pro-European, non-populist Romanian parties borrow populist language when referring to corruption is also needed in order to determine whether it is a matter of political style or a hidden red flag for actual populism.

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Affective dimension of Political Polarization. The role of Empathy

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Abstract

Among the various aspects that concern a discussed phenomenon such as populism, more and more importance is given to emotions and to the analysis of its affective dimension. The starting point of the populist vision is to establish the distinction “us-them”, and consequently this creates polarization and antagonism. Polarization is a complex phenomenon, strongly discussed especially in the United States, characterized by a conflictual logic to which are usually associated negative feelings. Is it possible to reverse this logic and to employ different emotions that are able to counter it? What are the emotions that can help with that? Many scholars today speak about Empathy. This paper aims to investigate approaches about the functionality and the role played by empathy in populist dynamics, particularly in polarisation, comparing different visions between who considers empathy as an element able to counteract antagonism and polarization, and who considers the contrary. The methodological framework of the proposal employs a theoretical perspective that refers mostly to historical-philosophical elements, with particular attention to the aspects of social and political psychology. In this sense it is first of all important to reconstruct the debate that has developed around the multiple meanings of empathy. The proposal aims at reflecting both on the strategic potential of the emotional aspect of the issue and on the analysis of the theories of this debate that can be useful to try to understand and to explain these political and social phenomena.

Keywords: emotions, empathy, polarization, populism, socio-political psychology

“It is now commonplace to observe that the last decade […] cannot be understood without taking into account the bursting of political emotions” (Maldonado, 2019, p. 15). As never before in recent decades there has been an exponential development of studies focusing on the role of emotions in the humanities and social sciences. Since the second half of the 1990s, the intellectual debate has focused on the analysis and study of the affective dimension of the human nature, for a long time considered secondary or even denigrated. This dimension includes all those concepts such as passions, emotions, affects and feelings. Rethinking the emotional space means rethinking the subject, the reality and the modes of interaction amongst these parts at the same time; this is because emotions fall into every aspect of human life, from individual to collective experiences. As Evans writes, “emotion is now a hot topic” (2001, p. xiii). In this theoretical context it is very important to reconsider the link between emotions and politics, which was already a highly controversial debate in classical thought with the theories of Aristotle

and Plato who introduced the central dichotomy that opposes reason to emotion. This vision traditionally binds the political sphere to the sphere of rationality, the so-called *Logos*. Indeed, over the centuries, from Greek philosophy to contemporary theories, political thought has usually associated the political dimension to rationality, and it has conceived politics also as a public sphere and as a space dominated by the rationality of the subjects. Classical thought already posed the problem of trying to explain what kind of relationship there was between the political space structured according to logic and rationality, and the pathic universe of individuals; emotions and passions have always been considered as unconscious and mostly irrational elements, like "other of rationality" (Demertzis, 2013) which need to be managed and controlled for the proper functioning of political and social dynamics.

> Studies of emotion have challenged the standard accounts of politics, shedding light on different forms of political action, dynamics of identity formation, and multi-dimensional aspects of civil engagement and political legitimacy. […] Over the last decades, we have witnessed an Affective turn within social and political sciences. […] This onto-epistemological turn has triggered a variety of normative consequences, one of which is the questioning of beliefs around democratic politics as essentially –when not exclusively– based on human rationality" (Cossarini & Vallespín, 2019, pp. 2-4).

Thanks to the development of this cultural turn (Clough & Halley, 2007; Thompson & Hoggett, 2012), basically a reaction to the poststructuralism (Terada, 2001) and excessive rationalism, and also to the complexity of the debate and the richness of the interdisciplinary studies (Damasio, 1994; Elster, 1999; Nussbaum, 2001; Lewis et al., 2008), many scholars have reconsidered the dialectic relationship between emotion and reason. In fact, they tried to demonstrate how both components actually play a role in the human decision-making process and in determining our actions. In particular, social psychology and political psychology have worked to eliminate this conflict by recognizing those two as essential elements for understanding human behavior and the unfolding of social relations. "Attending to the affective turn is necessary to theorizing the social" (Clough & Halley, 2007, p. 2). Reflecting on the relationship between emotions and politics means considering key categories and concepts that are related to dynamics of conflict, political communication, democratic politics and democratic dynamics. Amongst them, Political Theory has focused on the role that emotions, passions or affects, which are different concepts with a different semantic, play in the ambiguous phenomenon that is Populism; a phenomenon that Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (1969) have defined as "a specter that haunts the world" (p. 1) by paraphrasing Marx and Engel's famous line. Populism is such a polysemous concept that an epistemic clash is occurring in order to understand and identify the appropriate approach to deal with this phenomenon. Nowadays, especially in the European and North American debate, this term means a certain way of doing politics which represents a general danger to democracy and pluralism; it has become a key category in recent political theory, and for this reason many scholars have focused on its affective properties, which are now necessary to understand the dynamics of our time (Bonansinga, 2020).

> Since populism is something intrinsically related to democratic politics – as has been rightly pointed out, it follows democracy as a shadow –, it becomes clear that current accounts of emotions also have important theoretical and practical repercussions for the study of democratic politics (Cossarini & VallespÍn, 2019, p. 3).

This is a notion strongly debated by contemporary political theory and political science. In fact, in recent years the concept of populism has gained massive attention in political discourses, becoming part not only of the theoretical language but also of the language of political leaders. Contemporary politics is therefore dealing with this new "form". It is not a new phenomenon, which has historically appeared around 1800 and then has changed over time depending on geographical, political and social contexts, but never as in the latest years it has forcefully manifested in different democratic contexts. The literature on this issue is vast and the complexity of research on populism makes this field of inquiry already characterized by widespread disagreement and a lack of full definitional consensus over the essence of the phenomenon (Weyland, 2001). This is, indeed, a notion that is used mostly in a polemic way.

Nadia Urbinati (2019) says that “the term “populism” itself is ambiguous and it is difficult to define in a sharp and uncontested way. This is because it is not an ideology or a specific political regime but rather a *representative process,* through which a collective subject is constructed so that it can achieve power” (p. 5). In academic literature, populism can be considered as an ideology that divides society into two opposed groups. Some scholars, for example, speak of populism as “thin-centered ideology” because of the inner ambiguities of the phenomenon (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Stanley, 2008); according to Laclau’s vision (2005) it can be considered as a series of discursive practices which constitute the real essence of politics and create the concept of "people", or also as a “rhetorical style” (Canovan, 1981). Regardless of how it is theorized, the starting point of the populist vision is to establish a dynamic of conflict through the distinction *us-them*, *élite-people*, or *inside-outside*, and consequently this creates polarization and antagonism in society and among individuals. But what exactly is polarization? “Polarization is both a state and a process. Polarization as a state refers to the extent to which opinions on an issue are opposed in relation to some theoretical maximum. Polarization as a process refers to the increase in such opposition over time” (DiMaggio et al., 1996, p. 693). It is a complex phenomenon that can manifest itself in various ways, characterized by a conflictual logic, ideological gaps and conflictual attitudes among individuals and the different components of society. According to a recent study by Jan-Willem van Prooijen (2021),

> (a) political polarization implies excessive confidence in the correctness of one’s views, which may lead to overconfidence in decision making; (b) political polarization is associated with an intolerant mindset where alternative viewpoints are seen as immoral; and (c) political polarization enhances a motivated reasoning process, leading people to reject scientific knowledge that is incompatible with their ideological beliefs (p. 5).

Partisan differences are not negative in their nature and are part of the democratic game fueling pluralism; however, when differences grow exponentially and they exceed a certain degree of intensity and lead to conflict, the phenomenon of polarization can become pathological creating complex challenges for democratic regimes. It is a political and social phenomenon that recently has been tried to be explained through a psychological analysis that is mainly focused on the attitudes of individuals and groups. Social and political psychologists have tried to explain the phenomenon of polarization in different ways. In particular through the Persuasive Arguments Theory, PAT (Vinokur & Burnstein, 1974), which suggests that shifts in group decisions result from sharing relevant and factual information about the situation and everything is based on the persuasiveness of the arguments, based on their validity and ability to convince; and through the Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954; Brown,

1965; Sanders & Baron, 1977) based on the belief that individuals form, evaluate and consolidate their opinions by comparing themselves to others. The recent studies of emotions, not only in the philosophical and historical field but also in these empirical fields such as socio-political psychology and social neuroscience, have widely studied the relationship between polarization generated by populism and some political emotions which are at the core of democratic life, recognizing a strong affective dimension as a crucial component of this phenomenon. Emotions contribute to identity formation, and they take part in the creation of social bonds and the promotion of social cohesion (Markell, 2000). According to this theoretical approach, polarization has usually been associated with negative feelings (Van Prooijen & Krouwel, 2019) like hate, disdain, fear (Van Prooijen et al., 2015), anxiety or anger (Frimer et al., 2018) that feed conflict and opposition. According to Sinnot-Amstrong (2018), for example, the most important aspects of polarization are "antagonism" and "incivility" which lead to all those negative feelings previously mentioned. Due to the increasing interest in the study of emotions and in particular of "political emotions", attempts have been made to think of an alternative vision that would not associate these phenomena only to negative emotions and, instead, seeking other emotions that might have a potential to counter the logic of conflict and opposition. Is it possible to reverse this logic and employ different emotions able to counter it? What are the emotions that can help with that? Many scholars today speak about Empathy. It is a concept that appears in philosophical thought with the theories of David Hume and Adam Smith who speak of "sympathy". It is precisely from the sympathy that it is possible to trace a common thread to contemporary developments. Indeed, it is placed at the basis of morality and human society, understood in particular by Hume as a sharing of the pleasure or pain produced in a person affected by an action. He also included in his moral philosophy an empirical explanation from which to derive the moral judgments and actions of human beings, a psychological mechanism, sympathy, capable of involving men in intersubjective communications. He wrote:

> No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than the propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own. (...) Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition. So remarkable a phenomenon merits our attention and must be traced up to its first principles (Hume, 1739, pp. 316-17).

According to Smith (1976),

> by the imagination we place ourselves in this situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them" (p. 9),

like a sharing of any feeling of other people through a process of identification with the other. Sympathy is considered as the natural predisposition of individuals because it is an essential element of human nature and the foundation of social relations, and which indissolubly binds the sphere of morality to that of sentiment. During the nineteenth century, studies on empathy developed mainly in the through the

thought of these two authors, and then developed as an essentially psychological concept following the birth of scientific psychology and the pioneering studies of Theodor Lipps, who placed the concept of *Einfühlung* at the basis of his theories (1903). In these studies, empathy is conceived as a mechanism of psychological resonance triggered during the perceptive encounter with external objects unleashing a sort of process of fusion between subject and object, through the so-called "emotional participation". Later developments saw the formulation of Scheler's emotional contagion theory (1954), *Gefühlsansteckung*, studies in psychoanalysis, until the discovery in the neuroscientific field of mirror neurons (Rizzolatti et al., 1999; Gallese, 2003) that definitively introduced empathy into contemporary debate. Today, we often hear about empathy even if there is not yet an entirely shared consensus on what it actually is; as Gérard Jorland (2004) wrote, it has emerged "*concept 'nomade' par excellence*" (p. 19). It is generally understood as the capacity to feel other's people feelings, identify with the other, move from our own point of view. According to the most recent debate, empathy can be differentiated into three types and each of these aspects could help in the dynamics of social and political cohesion: cognitive, the capacity to understand another's perspective or mental state; affective, sharing of similar emotions; somatic, physical reaction, probably based on mirror neuron responses. At the core of recent literature, the study of the link between empathy and the role played in political and social dynamics has been widely developed. In addition, many scholars have focused on how much empathy counts in the dynamics of polarization and whether it can prove to be, or not, an element capable of combating it. In this context, it has been theorized a fundamental concept, the so-called empathic concern, which refers to other emotions like compassion, sympathy and love. For those who consider empathy as a functional factor for cohesion, it is important to consider the mechanism of the persons involved in the reciprocal experiences: especially with regard to the experiences of pain and the sight of injustice, which leads to attitudes of solidarity and to the rediscovery of a strong social bond. However, from a different perspective, the dynamics created by empathy do not always completely eliminate polarization, as it can be seen in the studies of the psychologist Paul Bloom's book Against Empathy (2016), or in the studies of the political psychologist Elizabeth Simas (Simas, Clifford, & Kirkland, 2020). Empathic concern divides the question into an internal and an external level: empathy can strengthen links of members of the same group, but also accentuate the differences (social, political, cultural, ideological and economic) towards outgroup members. The theme of the link between empathy and polarization is strongly debated with respect to the American situation, especially after the famous Obama's discourse:

> You know, there's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit. But I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit – the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through the eyes of those who are different from us […] cultivating this quality of empathy will become harder, not easier. There's no community service requirement in the real world; no one forcing you to care. […] Not only that – we live in a culture that discourages empathy (2006).

The United States has been experiencing a dramatic increase in partisan social and political polarization and, especially since the 2016 elections, the citizens show more and more contempt towards the opposite party. American theorists have tried to respond to these gaps with this social emotion: empathy. In this framework, in addition to the political polarization, it is also possible to speak of affective

(Iyengar et al., 2019) and ideological polarization. Regarding the situation of American parties, it has been noted that:

> Republicans and Democrats have moved further apart on political values and issues, there has been an accompanying increase in the level of negative sentiment that they direct toward the opposing party […]. Among members of both parties, the shares with very unfavorable opinions of the other party have more than doubled since 1994 (Pew Research Center 2017, 65).

Given the recent social tensions and the increasingly frequent conflicts between groups, it seems to be common opinion that American people are becoming even more hostile towards who belongs to another different party. In this sense, it has become stronger and stronger the idea that empathy can actually produce results that exacerbate the hostility that people feel about members of an outgroup. The ability to empathize is an important factor in determining how we respond to politics and, more importantly, how politics affects people (Feldman et al., 2020). According to some conceptions, the ability to feel empathy varies according to political ideals and political positions and, traditionally, liberal politicians and liberal and democratic voters are likely to have greater capacity; therefore, empathy seems closer to liberal policies. However, this is not a universally shared idea, and it is part of a series of very complex analyses and studies. Paul Bloom (2016) argues that liberals and conservatives are different not in terms of their general levels of empathy, but rather in terms of whom they empathize with.

Contemporary literature on personality traits shows that generally liberals tend to be more open to social change, more egalitarian, more favorable to economic policies aimed at eliminating wealth inequality and promoting the welfare of groups subject to discrimination, more favorable in their attitudes towards immigration (Morris 2020, pp. 10-11). Several studies seem to demonstrate a correlation between the degree of empathy and this type of aptitude, and therefore with the various political groups. The debate on the relationship between empathy and polarization, as we have seen, appears still very controversial since there are ambivalent conceptions regarding the role of empathy in polarization dynamics. Every research that seeks to resolve these fractures, must keep in mind how empathy is a complex concept, so how complex is human nature. Populism and polarization are phenomena that are now part of our politics; it is necessary to think of a different narrative that is not only a general appeal for solidarity and compassion, but an effective way of strengthening social relations among the individuals.

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Covid-19, the Crisis of the European Union, and the heterogeneous Far-Right in Europe – The importance of the Far Right's Imagination of Europe before and after the Covid-Crisis

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Abstract

The Covid-Crisis took off during a long during multiple crisis of the European Union. Thus, the measures taken by the European Union and its Member-States to battle the pandemic were determined by former conflicts about handling facets of the crises. Paradoxically, new paths to Europeanization opened while conflicts within the EU were deepened with the battle over the rule of law with in struggling over the recovery and resilience facility, installed to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus. Often misrecognized, a crucial part of these struggles is the question of de/legitimizing the ongoing processes of Europeanization through developing imaginations of a future for Europe. Thus, different imaginations of 'Europe' itself form the center of and are shaped by those struggles. Hence, Covid-19 had also a strong impact on the imaginations of (the future of) Europe. The Article aims to develop a concept of poly-crisis to put the Covid-crisis in its place and to contextualize properly the empirical material in its respective historical situation. The imagination of Europe is an important part of the struggles over crisis management. The Article will focus on the far-rights imaginations of Europe before and after the pandemic. Thus, the far right became an important force in European politics, its imagination of a "true Europe" has lost some of its importance in the covid-crises and it seems to be losing its ability to integrate the heterogenous right. Otherwise, we can find some rearticulations of Europe in the different far-right approaches to the pandemic. To handle such a wide topic, the presentation will focus on the German AfD and the role of Europe in the European election campaign in 2018/19 and in the debates on the European recovery programs.

Keywords: European Union, political crisis, far-right, Covid-19, power relations

Introduction

The Covid-19-pandemic has shaken the European Union to its core amid unsolved economic and political crises. Particularly economic developments were disrupted by the Covid-impact in some unprecedented manner. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the World faced "a crisis like no other" and it projected in June 2020 a global negative growth of 4.9% (IMF, 2020, p.7). Even worse than this projection, the "gross-domestic product of the euro-area fell by 7.6 per cent"

(Tooze, 2021). Such severe developments encountered an EU in decade-long crises and after the Brexit in new and sharpened inner conflicts and threats of further disintegration or fragmentation. The latter should not be misunderstood as simple retrodisplacement of competencies from the European to the national scale, but as enhanced conflicts within the EU in a state of a "poly-crisis"[1] (Bader et.al., 2011; Knodt & Große Hüttmann & Kobusch, 2020). The heterogeneous Far-Right has become, due to its success in elections and through established extra-parliamentary networks, an important actor in the struggles over the crisis management and the future of the EU. On major element of the fundament of its European collaborations is an imaginary of Europe, that is contrasted to the EU, which functions as unifier and symbolic center of their ideology. In the following I want to give a brief sketch of some preliminary results of an ongoing research on the Importance of the imaginary of Europe for the Far-Right as an actor in the enduring poly-crisis of the EU. I think, European collaborations must be taken more seriously, the Far-Right is a transnational force, which strategies and believes must be analyzed as well as its networks. These imaginaries of Europe are adopted to different societal contexts, but overall it is a specific interpretation of the poly-crisis. To situate and analyze these imaginaries, I will give a brief outline of my theoretical framework of analyzing the poly-crisis, analyze the Far-Rights place in the struggles over crisis-management and then show empirical findings on the main elements of the imaginary of Europe in two specific situations: the European election campaign 2018/19 and the debates on the European recover- and Resilience Facility to combat the Covid-Crisis.

Theoretical framework: The State Project Europe…

The fundamental context of the rise of the far right almost all over Europe – and of course beyond Europe – is to be found in the multiple crisis of capitalism and democracy, which emerged in specific intertwinements between different levels and dimensions of the crises in the European Union. As we are, hence, witnessing over a decade of crises after the financial crash in 2008 and the following euro crisis, or in a broader sense, four decades of crises after the end of Fordist capitalism. It seems to be time to take the short golden age of capitalism in the Fordist era as the unusual, as a specific, historic contingent period of stable accumulation combined with more or less a welfare state and growth led by increasing consumption. Thus, instable, and crisis-driven processes are the normal ways of capitalist reproduction. This said, the following argument tries to develop an approach for understanding current developments and to emphasize the importance of societal imaginaries within struggles over crisis solutions.

My Approach, however, for analyzing these multiple developments and the specific praxis of different actors on the field of battling for or against the future of the EU, is to draw on state theoretical assumptions and critical European research combined with critical research on the far-right. This combination attempts to follow Virchows demand to develop a broader concept of analyzing the Far-right in its societal context (cf. Virchow, 2018). Thus, we can define far-right success in becoming a relevant force not just in social struggles but also in its increasing influence on shaping institutional settings and developments of various policy fields. Economical or cultural explanations of the rise of the far-right are often too one-dimensional and misjudge the genuine political shape and form of the social context (cf. Schäfer & Zürn, 2021). To analyze, hence, the increasing influence on different policy fields,

the fundamental societal form of politics must be considered. It is, thus, the question, why politics takes on this specific form, materialized in the state (cf. Hirsch, 1994; Buckel & Martin, 2019). In short, the relative separation of the political form results from conflictual processes of the social reproduction of the material life (cf. Hirsch, 1974; Marx & Engels, 1846, p.28). Hence, capitalism is 'fundamentally characterized by private ownership of the means of production, formally free labor, private production, the exchange of commodities, and competition' (Hirsch & Kannankulam 2009, p.5). The social character of individual work is not given immediately but is mediated through the market and the circulation of capital. Social relations become objectified and reified forms, a process by which they appear as external to the individuals. Humans are dominated by their own objectified social relations, and this determines their immediate perception of reality (cf. Hirsch, 1994, p.161). Furthermore, these relations imply specific sexist gender-relations (cf. Wöhl, 2019; Genetti, 2008) and racist power relations (cf. Keil, 2015). Such conceptualization of the political form as the way of processing social conflicts and contradictions implies, that the state itself is neither a subject nor a monolithic bloc, but moreover a "material condensation of the relations of social forces" (Poulantzas, 2002, p.159) This is not bound to a specific spatial scale either, the dominance of the national scale in the national state must be analyzed as historic result of a complex set of conflicts and relations of social forces. The state consists of various apparatuses without having a "substantive unity qua institutional ensemble" (Jessop, 2016, p.84). Rather the state has a "polymorphic character" (ibd., 42ff.) and its unity emerges out of societal struggles. Drawing on insights of Antonio Gramsci (1998ff.) and Nicos Poulantzas (2002) the mode of these struggles is to be conceptualized as struggle over hegemony, which includes that particular actors are able to generalize their interests and generate consensus through certain concessions to subaltern actors in specific struggles. Hegemony, hence, is a form of societal power which can form a social bloc within the state, which includes also antagonistic actors through concession and consent (cf., Anderson, 2018, p.36). Two concepts must be differentiated for analyzing the forming of various societal interests to an important societal force: the concept of hegemony projects and the concept of state projects. Hegemony projects must be considered as "bundles of strategies" (Buckel & Kannankulam & Georgi & Wissel, 2017, p.17), applied by various actors, who not necessarily must be directly connected. Moreover, hegemony projects are formed by similar strategies, implying a similar rationality and vision of general social development which are produced in struggles over concrete problems, situated in specific historical circumstances. Thus, lose but similar strategies must be bundled in a unifying narrative or (political) imaginary (cf. Jessop, 2004), wherefore "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci) are crucial. They bundle the societal strategies and their implications in a major narrative or imaginery, which functions as bridge builder between slightly different, but still similar, strategies and actors, in particular in unifying strategies from different policy fields. This means, to develop a "common sense", a worldview, an epistemology implying a specific relation of knowledge and truth (cf., Buckel, 2013, p.18). Hence, hegemony projects are characterized as analytical concepts to distinguish different actors in specific struggles over determined societal problems on the basis of their strategies and shared narrative. But it is important to understand, that hegemony projects are not the only form, social forces can take. As hegemony is a general mode of political rule in capitalist societies, some actors apply anti-hegemonial strategies, aiming not at consensus, but, for instance, at total dominance. But the concept of hegemony projects helps also in distinguishing non- or anti-hegemonial practices, projects, and narratives from those aiming for hegemony (cf., Buckel et.al, 2014).

The second concept of state projects is different insofar, as it

> denotes the political imaginaries, projects, and practices that (1) define and regulate the boundaries of the state system vis-à-vis the wider society and (2) seek to provide the state apparatus thus demarcated with sufficient substantive internal operational unity for it to be able to perform its inherited or redefined 'socially accepted' tasks. (Jessop, 2016, p.84)

Following these brief determinations, the European Union can be conceived as an ensemble of state-apparatuses (cf., Wissel, 2015; Buckel et.al., 2014), which does not become a state yet – and is not necessarily determined to become a state at least. As diverse ensemble of transnational, national and regional apparatuses, it is rather a state in becoming (Wissel, 2015). Thus, the EU is a crucial part of what has been analyzed as "internationalization" (Hirsch, 2001) or "the rise of the transnational state" (Robinson 2001) at least since the Maastricht treaty 1992. In transforming the spatial configuration of materializing and condensing political struggles, the latter are now related in complex manners to the European Scale (cf., Wissel & Wolff, 2017). Europe also became important in social and political imaginaries and narratives in attempts to gain hegemony and a European state project. The societal context of conflicts is, hence, structured by the institutional and spatial setting of the European ensemble of state-apparatuses and the social forces with their different and contradicting imaginations and narratives about Europe and its relation to the Nation(state). I will argue, that the heterogenous European far-right has become an important actor who is taken recourse on a specific imaginary of Europe. The heterogenous far-right is, however, not a hegemony project, because it is not trying to gain hegemony but dominance. Its project seems to be better characterized as state project (cf., Opratko, 2017, p.129) because it is aiming at the rearticulation of the relations of the state and society (cf., Kipfer & Saberi, 2016), where Europe plays an important role, in particular in times of the ongoing European poly-crisis.

…in Crisis: Losing Legitimacy, democratic backsliding, and the future of the EU…

The European state project is at least for a decade in a state of a poly-crisis. Poly-Crisis must be understood not like the building of a wave in the ocean, triggered by one cause, but as a variety of different crises, which are reinforcing themselves mutually. Understanding the EU as ensemble of state-apparatuses is, hence, different to approaches that interpreting the crises as a crisis of globalization and its relation to the national-states. It is moreover a complex reconfiguration of power-relations, which are permeated by contradictions (cf., Wissel, 2019, p.49f.). It is one fundamental characterization of the crises, that those contradictions threaten to blow up the EU, because it has become more difficult to process them. This means, before Covid-19, the development of the EU was in crisis in at least three dimensions: economically, politically, and ideologically. In short, the economic crisis can be traced back to the 1960s/70s crisis of overaccumulation, which was responded by a general shift to neoliberal forms of economic development (cf., Harvey, 2003). In the EU this was laid down in the treaties from Maastricht to Lisbon, founding a "new constitutionalism" (Gill, 1998) of neoliberal monetary and fiscal policies,

building up an “iron cage” (Ryner, 2015) of neo/ordoliberal governance. With this codification, economic policy was oriented towards austerity and at the same time removed from political dispute. A “dethronement of politics by virtue of the constitutional declaration of the sanctity of the economy” (Chamayou, 2020, p.310) took place, which led to a “de-politicization” (Davidson, 2017, p.630) of politics. At the same time, this “over-constitutionalisation” (Grimm, 2015) has the consequence that the relative autonomy of state apparatuses becomes precarious vis-à-vis economic actors and that a class faction was thus able to secure its dominant position, while in particular the apparatuses in which subaltern interests could articulate themselves were weakened. This led to cracks in the bloc in power, i.e., also to splits within alliances within the ruling classes. With this hardening of the political form, their possibilities to litigate conflicting interests dwindled. Thus, a political crisis emerged that led to a crisis of democracy, that is shaped by a crisis of the EU’s legitimacy in the three dimensions of input, output, and throughput legitimacy (cf., Schmidt, 2020). Forms of “autocratization” (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019) can be detected on both, the national scale with the emergence of so-called illiberal regimes, for instance in Hungary or in Poland (Kelemen, 2020), and the European scale as forms of authoritarian developments through applying austerity-measures (cf., Oberndorfer, 2020). This is combined with a now long-lasting crisis of hegemony, as the mechanisms of gaining consent are weakened and so these different crises are triggering a constellation I want to determine as ideological crisis. This means, the ‘old’ narrative of the EU as a guarantor of peace and security, or of preserving and increasing prosperity and human rights progress through ever deeper integration, no longer works (cf., Brasche, 2017, p.337). Ideological crisis, hence, means, that the hegemonial imaginary of Europe is questioned to its core, and the struggle over redefining Europe has become important part of societal struggles at all. The idea, that the process of European integration was irreversible progress had become doubtful with the Brexit at least. The EU launched with the Bratislava Declaration 2016, therefore, a program of redefining the future of Europe, which was started with a white book and five reflection papers to start a debate on how the EU should look like in future. Meanwhile, in May 2021, the Conference on the Future of Europe has started with initiating citizen forums and other spaces for this discussion. It is both, an attempt to regain legitimacy through creating spaces of debate involving citizens from all over Europe, and an expression of the ideological crisis as it the future development of the EU is contested through the poly-crises in a profound manner. As we will see, the heterogenous far-right themselves had many discussions about what Europe should mean, which was and is an important part of their strategic arsenal for European or transnational collaborations.

…and Covid-19: external shocks?

As in the beginning of the initiating process of the conference for the future of Europe it looked like a form of creating spaces for debate and participation of ‘ordinary’ citizens, without changing the overall economic and political fundament, i.e. the neo/ordoliberal constitution, the impact of the Covid-19-crisis appeared to be not only a massive shock, in particular for the economy, and exacerbation of the poly-crisis, but also seemed to challenge old certainties. In March 2020, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the EU Commission, spoke of an “external shock caused by the virus”, which had put companies “in distress through no fault of their own (...). After all, they “are healthy in themselves” (von der Leyen,

2020). The term “external shock” refers to two things: first, to the core of a legitimization strategy for the EU’s upcoming measures against the crisis; second, this narrative offers the possibility to claim that the current Corona crisis is unrelated to previous crises. Both follow from a certain logic of the EU’s political crisis management. The legitimation strategy of the “external shock” also reacts to the fact that at the beginning of the pandemic, the EU in fact played no role in the organization of the crisis management, there was “no sense of solidarity between the member states of the European Union” (Vogel, 2020, p.5). Rather, the distortions within the EU as well as the results of the neoliberal-authoritarian processing of the multiple crisis, which developed from the financial and economic crisis of 2008 onwards, became apparent. Thus, a massive crisis of the infrastructure appeared, which showed the results of the long enduring neoliberal order of the EU. But after the short phase of retreat on the national scale, a return to the European scale became visible. In particular, the NextGenerationEU-Program and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, both adopted at the EU summit in July 2020, brought the European Union back in (cf., Sablowski, 2020). The decisions of the summit of 21 July 2020 have at least softened the paradigm of the EU’s debt prohibition and could appear as a first step out of the politics of austerity with installing a new kind of European fiscal policy. The French historian Sylvain Kahn, for instance, interpreted this as the birth of the State of Europe (2020). At the same time, there are contradictory processes and multiplied conflicts within the EU. In particular, the disputes over the recovery and resilience facility show the shift in the balance of power within the EU and an increase in the inherent conflict dimensions: conflicts over European fiscal and debt policy, the rule of law and the European Green Deal can be identified, in which different constellations of actors are pitted against each other (de la Porte & Jensen, 2021). This means; thus, the Covid-Crisis reinforced the contradictory processes of a deeper integration with enhancing inner conflicts and strengthening of centrifugal forces. The heterogenous far-right is, hence, rearticulating its role in these conflicts.

The heterogenous Far Right and the imaginary of Europe

By now the far-right became an important actor in European struggles over the handling of the poly-crises, although concurrently in 2020 the support for Far-Right Parties – measured in polls – declined (cf., Betz, 2020, p.73). But it would be wrong to consider them as “victims of the pandemic” (Wondreys & Mudde, 2020). Furthermore, processes of rearticulation and reorganization started with the emergence of movements against government measures adopted to fight the pandemic, which threatened the project of the Far-Right with further fragmentation. Basically, the Far-Right is everything but a homogeneous actor in the arena of politics (cf., Mudde, 2019, p.163f.). Rather it always has been fragmented into different parties, movements or even a “myriad of groups or grouplets” (Griffin, 2008, p.175). Roger Griffin defined the “groupuscular right” as a “new political genus” of the radical-right after World War II, characterized as “centreless (or rather polycentric) movement with fluid boundaries and constantly changing components”. (Griffin, 2003, p.30) Thus, it is common in researching the Far Right to distinguish the different groups to get proper and clear definitions of the different forms of far-right organizing/organization and/or ideology (far right, extreme right, populist right etc.). But this is far more difficult when boundaries between the different groups are fluid and not strictly

separable. We can see this also within Far-Right (or populist) Parties, that are characterized by a “strategic” (Havertz, 2020) or “programmatic ambivalence” (Ptak, 2018), with deep inner contradictions. My approach is, however, to focus on the emergence of a Far-Right project in the context of the poly-crisis of the EU. Thus, I use the term of the heterogeneous Far-Right as umbrella Term to underline, that it is not a priori an actor with same strategies and purposes but has to be unified under certain ideological and strategic alignments. The imaginary of Europe always has been such a unifier for the Far-Right. Building mythical narratives of Europe ever should help to reframe the fields of societal conflict and to mobilize affects for a Far-Right “ecumenicalism” (Griffin, 2008, p.175). There were plenty of attempts to define a mythical, folkish Europe through the decades by various authors of the Far-Right (cf., Keil, 2020a) to reinterpret the societal constellation to push forward the development of a new semantical order. The struggle over the imaginary of Europe is a weighty part of current social developments. This imaginary contains assumptions about the relationship between state and society, which inherit an entire world view. But there is no uniform image of Europe on the far-right; it changes with social developments. Nevertheless, it can thus function as an ideological centre of transnational networking.

Methodology

Following Gramsci's insight, that, in times of crisis, people become aware of the societal conflicts “on the terrain of ideology” (Gramsci, 1998, p.1568). Thus, I am analyzing the construction of the imaginary of Europe in speeches, hold by members of the AfD in two occasions and relate them to the historical context they were held to identify the main components and its transformation. Fundamentally I am analyzing the material from a perspective of a historical-materialistic approach, which allows to identify strategies in a historic-specific setting of governance, domination, and exploitation. Thus, I use historical-materialist policy analysis to determine the societal context (Buckel et.al., 2014). Policy fields are not just institutional settings of debate and struggle, but also materialized condensations of the relations of social forces, implying a specific epistemological and ideological selectivity and frame. From the perspective of a politics of knowledge-approach, these fields are structured by a discourse, which consists out of smaller units of (ideological) assumptions and statements concerning the whole field, which must be interpreted as a part of the whole (cf., Nullmeier, 1993). According to coding-principles of qualitative content analysis (cf., Mayring, 2008), I developed a set of categories inductively, which was improved in a two-step coding procedure. This was done manually. Thus, the coding-set consists out of some main-categories like “State and EU” and “Enemy Images”, which have a set of subcodes. For “State and EU” for instance “EU” for statements on the EU, “Europe” for statements on Europe as different to the EU, “Sovereignty” for statements on democracy and the people, and so on. “Enemy Images” vary from “migration” or “Islam” to “globalists” to “climate activism”. Passages/Statements could be coded twice or more to identify connections between the codes. For instance, see the following passage of Björn Höckes Speech at the Hermannstreffen 2018:

> According to this new globalist agenda, the EU has become an agency for the dissolution of European culture and the peoples who support it. This is confirmed by a number of

> statements made in the past by top political officials of the EU and various strategy papers that are openly accessible, which were developed or at least supported by the EU itself, such as the UN paper Replacement Migration or currently the often - thankfully often - quoted global compact for migration. (Höcke, 2018, Translation DK)

This is coded as “EU” as well as “globalists” and “migration” because it contains assumptions on every single item. This allows to identify the main motifs and their intertwinement and to answer the questions: what are the main motifs of the imaginary of Europe? What are the main topics and hostilities? What are the implications and effects on building a common project of the European Far-Right? Has the imaginary of Europe changed?

The Imaginaries of Europe before Covid-19: The European Election Campaign 2018/19

The European election campaign 2018/19 for the European Parliament mark some rearticulation and reorganizing of the European Far-Right. While the Election was declared as a fundamental choice for the general direction of the European integration processes (cf., Leggewie, 2019) It was embedded in the “Future of Europe”-Campaign, mentioned above, and, hence, it was also a space for debating the fundamental meaning of Europe. Additionally, it was clear, that with the Brexit and the exit of the Conservative Party and UKIP, that the fractions on the right would be very different after the election. Thus, the parties of the Far-Right started to initiate new collaborations, what finally ended in the new fraction Identity and Democracy. The self-understanding of what Europe should be was an important part of these processes. They also wanted to counter the accusation that they were anti-Europeans with their own image of Europe. The material I analyzed comes from one conference called “The True Europe” by the folkish “Wing” of the AfD. This was to set a cornerstone for the European collaboration and the forming of a new right-wing-group in the European Parliament, in having high profiled guest from the Italian Lega – Gianluca Savoigni – holding a short speech. The other speakers were Björn Höcke, Andreas Kalbitz, Christian Blex and Thomas Röckermann. Due to the character of the meeting, as a discussion of the core of their concept of Europe, the speeches hold were from approximately 20 to 60 minutes length long considerations of respectively certain aspects of this concept. Every speech covered a specific topic related to the imagination of Europe. Secondly, I analyzed speeches hold at the kick-off-Rally for the Campaign held by Alexander Gauland, Dirk Spaniel, Jörg Meuthen and Guido Reil, as well as a speech by Alice Weidel, held at another Rally during the Campaign.

Although creating an imaginary of Europe, the centre of its construal consists of attacking the EU as “bureaucratic moloch” (Höcke, 2018), “standardisation, bureaucracy, rule by functionaries, regulation, centralism, redistribution, egalitarianism” (Blex, 2018) or a “bureaucratic Combination of 27 States” (Weidel, 2019). In general, the speakers situate their assumptions in the context of the crisis of democracy (for instance Gauland, 2019) and they tie in with the crisis of legitimacy and try to expand it. The European election, thus, is declared to a decision on the future of Europe, if it will become the “fool’s ship utopia” (ibid.) or not. It is insinuated, that the time to act is running low, Höcke declared,

that “if Europe is to have a future, its peoples must first of all wake up from their twilight sleep, which is almost a sleep of death.” (2018) In inverting the characterization of their own party as anti-European and anti-democratic, the EU becomes a symbol for an undemocratic, bureaucratic Entity, whereas they call themselves “true Europeans” (Kalbitz, 2018), who “love Europe” (Weidel, 2019). Unsurprisingly the “true Europe” is determined mainly through negative characterizations of the EU in a strictly dichotomic manner (for this dichotomy see also: Glencross, 2020). The most important markings of enemies are to denote the EU as agency of global elites, who uses it to foster migration to work against European culture and the European people. At this point, the underlying concept of democracy can be identified as follows: the precondition for democracy consists of a homogeneous people with a homogeneous culture. Thus, attacking the EU as anti-democratic does not imply any conceptions of improved mechanisms of participation in decisions, but it inherit a general claim, that the EU is a entity that disintegrate the homogenous culture in order to destroy the possibilities of forming a political will of the people (for a deeper analysis see: Keil, 2020b). This is expressed in the centrality of migration in the speeches. The most connections made are between the EU and migration processes, sometimes almost directly named as “the great replacement”. This myth was formulated by French writer Renaud Camus (2017) which consists of a conspiracy theory, that the elites are planning to replace the native population with migrants. Gauland for instance, marks the central cleavage of Europe as the between supporters and enemies of migration (Gauland 2019). The own imaginary of Europe is almost not determined besides these negative markings of enemies. This remains vague, as can be seen in formulations such as Europe as a “spirit” (Höcke 2018) or the assertion of European cultures that are going to be destroyed. Thus, Europe can function as umbrella-concept for various currents of the European Far-Right.

The Pandemic and the Debates over the Recovery- and Resilience-Facility and the “true Europe” after Covid-19

The Pandemic had a huge impact on the EU and its member states, hence the context of the crisis was quite different to the election campaign. While the election campaign was characterized by the ideological crisis of the EU and its attempts to regain legitimacy, whereas the Far-Right imaginary of Europe contrasted a “true Europe” to build up European collaborations, the covid-crisis superseded the debates over the future and legitimacy of Europe and the ideological crisis. Moreover, economic, and fiscal dogmas crumbled, even the globalization and globalized markets were questioned while a comeback of the nation-state was suggested. The struggles over the European plans to combat the Covid-Crisis opened new frontlines within the EU in four dimensions: the French-German-Connection against the “frugal four”, Southern Europe in favor for a bigger budget for the recovery facility vs. austerity, and Hungary/Poland against the rule-of-law-paragraphs of the recovery and resilience-facility and the European green deal as part of overcoming the crisis (cf., de la Porte & Jensen, 2021). Thus, the Far-Right as relevant force on a European scale, was first fragmented and in multiple constellations and second it took time to adjust to the Pandemic. The programmatic ambivalence became a problem for some Parties like the AfD because they claimed obviously contradictory positions in a short time (at first that state measures would be too weak, then to abandon

all state measures against the pandemic). Also, within the European Far-Right contradictions were growing, but nevertheless, Members of the Identity and Democracy-Fraction still referred to a “true Europe” in debates over combating the virus (see: Keil, 2021).

The material laid down for following summary consists of speeches of AfD-Members of the German Bundestag in several debates on the European recovery- and resilience-Facility, which covers all debates concerning this decision between Mai 2020 and February 2021, precisely parliamentary sessions No. 166, 168, 169, 170, 175, 178, 179, 181, 197, 200 and 212. The speeches are short interventions, up to ca. 6 minutes, situated in heated debates, so, in contrary to the speeches during the election campaign, there was no room for longer considerations. But in struggling over a specific package of measures to combat the pandemic on a European scale, the imaginary of Europe is present as well as changed and transformed in those speeches.

The first thing that stands out is, that Europe as “spirit” does not play a certain role in these debates. The AfD-Members do not refer to a “true Europe”. It is moreover their effort to present themselves as Party of freedom and civil rights, targeting all measures taken by the German government as well as the EU-plans. Therein we can identify some more shifts in the cluster of enemy images: first, the global elites are personalized not just in German chancellor Angela Merkel, but also in French President Emanuel Macron (for instance: Boehringer, 2020a). Secondly, there is a shift from migration to climate politics in the center of marking enemies. The efforts of the EU to combat the poly-crisis with a green deal is interpreted by the AfD as part of a “great transformation” (Glaser, 2020) or “large-scaled transformation to a planned economy” (Boehringer, 2020b). This refers to the new myth of a “great reset”, interpreting a statement and a book by Klaus Schwab, director of the World Economic Forum in Davos, as concrete plan of the elite to set up a global dictatorship. The EU is, hence, interpreted as agency of the “great transformation” to install a European “Eco-Socialism” (Weidel, 2020) or an “eco-dictatorship” (Weyel, 2020). Migration is still an important topic, but the center of the European imaginary during the debates on combatting the Covid-Crisis consists now out of variations of the myth of the “great reset”. The central dichotomy is now the supporters and enemies of the government measures (or the “great reset”), which are accused of destroying the European freedom, culture, and democracy.

Conclusions

The Covid-19-Pandemic had a huge impact on the forming of a European Far-Right as relevant social force. While before Covid the heterogenous and programmatic ambivalent Far-Right build up networks and a new fraction in the European Parliament, with a vague dichotomic imaginary of a true Europe of homogenous people that is threatened by the EU and migration, as unifier, the inner ambivalences shown up again in adjusting to the new crisis. For the AfD as important force in the European Far-Right the imaginary of a “true Europe” lost some importance. The focus lies now on authoritarian imaginaries of democracy and (national) sovereignty rather than working on the imaginary of Europe. Nevertheless, both times, the imaginary of Europe refers to the crisis of legitimacy, the ideological crisis and thus the crisis of democracy. This reveals a strategy of propagating cultural homogeneous European peoples. The idea is that such homogeneity is the precondition for the direct expression of a popular will in the

state. In this way, right-wing actors interpret the changes in the relationship between state and society in an authoritarian way. This state-society relationship is thus at the centre of their imaginary. At the same time, the EU continues to serve as a projection surface and symbol in which the various enemy definitions amalgamate. Thereby we can identify shifts in the images of Enemies: migration could not function as main enemy anymore, thus, there is a shift from “the great replacement” to “the great reset” as major mythical belief. In the struggles over the imaginary of Europe withing the Far-Right appear the problems of adjusting to the new situation in the pandemic and the heterogeneity of the European Far-Right. It is itself threatened by fragmentation and reorganization and those ideological transformations are a major part of it. As a preliminary result, the imaginary of Europe was crucial for building up new alliances and the new fraction in the European Parliament after the Election 2019, but now the pandemic these efforts will be rearticulated through multiplied conflict-lines in Europe. Nevertheless, the Far-Right remains a dangerous alliance for democracy and freedom. It must be understood as transnational or European force, which is undergoing some bigger transformations, expressed in their ideologies and imaginaries. There is still a lot of research to be done.

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Learning by media-based public debate as increasing or decreasing polarization

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Abstract

This paper discusses the media-based public debate as a potential place for learning, and thereby indirectly investigates the potentially negative effects to the democratic society of such a debate, in this case, political polarization. The question here is, in what sense can the media-based public debate provide a space for learning, and what does it mean regarding the potential problems related to the debates. The aim is thus to understand the problems on a deeper level by investigating the alternative, the learning from others in the media-based public debate. A more implicit aim of this paper is to make explicit the idea of the media-based public debate as a space for learning from other members of the society despite all the problems currently related especially to the internet-based communication. I argue that being a space of learning does not, however, mean that the media-based public debate could not be also a polarizing phenomenon or provide the platform for other social problems, such as sharing of misinformation. This means that learning from other members of the society might not be incompatible with polarization, but the possibilities for both phenomena might exist simultaneously.

Keywords: public debate, learning, political polarization

Introduction

This paper discusses the media-based public debate as a potential place for learning, and thereby indirectly investigates the potentially negative effects of such a debate, such as political polarization. The question here is, in what sense can the media-based public debate provide a space for learning, and what does it mean regarding the potential problems related to the debates. The aim is thus to understand the problems on a deeper level by investigating the alternative, the learning from others in the media-based public debate. A more implicit aim of this paper is to make explicit the idea of the media-based public debate as a space for learning from other members of the society despite all the problems currently related especially to the internet-based communication.

I will argue in the following that being a space of learning does not, however, mean that the media-based public debate could not be also a polarizing phenomenon or provide the platform for other social problems, such as sharing of misinformation. This means that learning from other members of the

society might not be incompatible with polarization, but the possibilities for both phenomena might exist simultaneously.

I will do this by the means of concept analysis and deduction based on theories of the public debate and those of learning. I will proceed by defining and discussing the concepts of the media-based public debate, political polarization, and learning from others in this debate as informal learning by discussion. After this, I will elaborate on the simultaneous possibility of polarization and learning by media-based public debates.

The media-based public debate, polarization, and learning by discussion

The public debate is, according to Habermas's classical definition, an open and free discussion in the civic sphere between the private or work-life and the government (Habermas, 1974). It is a platform where members of the society can freely discuss public matters and where general opinions, values, and political action in the society can be formed and altered. This excludes topics that are private or professional (see also Arendt's argument about the public sphere excluding friendship and love, 1998).

In the 21st century, public debates mostly take place in the public or what I call semi-public media, that is, the media that are accessible to all members of the society or accessible but require a user account, a decent payment, or something similar. Habermas (2006) even argues that the public debate in its modern-day width would not exist without the massive media that are able to reach everyone in the society, although he is somewhat critical towards the mass media as a one-way communication from the journalists to the citizens. Habermas's critique of the mass media, however, does not quite hold in the era of social media as the social media provides much wider possibilities of participation than the news media. To cover the whole phenomenon of the media-based public debate, the term "media" in this study includes both the digital and other media, news media, and some social media, that is, every media that is not exclusive (e.g., work-related) or private (private messages, discussions within a closed group, etc.).

Moreover, according to Kupiainen (2013), there is no meaningful reason to narrow the investigations concerning the mediated communication down to the internet or non-internet, because the internet as such is not a media, but a basis for various media intertwined with each other and with those outside the internet. For example, many news media have both online and offline media, that is, on the internet and in print, television, or radio broadcast. The digital side of the news media can further be shared and discussed in other digital media, often social media. As in all media we encounter other members of the society, even if in more or less different communication formats, it is meaningful to discuss the media-based public debate on the general level, including all possible media platforms (even those that do not exist today but might exist tomorrow).

Especially in the case of the media-based public debate in the internet era, the society as if comes together in media and is visible in the debates in media, even including everyone in the society. As the access to the internet-based media allows more people to participate in the discussions that concern public matters, the media-based public debate has become less one-way communication from the media

elite to the masses than the mass media Habermas has criticised (see e.g., Kreide, 2016). This enables the members of the society to actually come together virtually, encountering other members of the society even from very far both geographically and mentally (e.g., in the cases of different ideologies, beliefs, etc.) and to mutually participate and become visible in the debate (for the argument about visibility as a condition of publicity, see Arendt, 1998).

At the same time, due to the social media and other semi-public internet spaces, the line between the public and the non-public has become vaguer than it was before the internet (Papacharissi, 2014). Thereby the definitive distinction between the public and the private spheres becomes, instead of the physical space, the aim, the reach, and the topic of the communication, such as the intention to speak to an audience including potentially anyone in the society (see Badouard et al, 2016). For example, statements made by a politician as a politician discussing public matters on Twitter can be considered a part of the public debate, as they discuss publicly relevant matters and are both meant to and often do reach the public audience, while an entertaining cat video on the same platform is not meant to comment on anything. Thus, while there are some more or less clear examples of what belongs to the public debates in media and what does not, there remains a grey area between the clearly public and non-public debates. For example, a content in public or semi-public media might comment on something personal, thus potentially being part of a discussion (see Bridges, 1979), but not aimed at the wider audience and certainly not aimed to participate in discussing social or political matters, even if it would not remain private either (more or less unintentionally). Also, the belonging to the public debate might be context-related. For example, in 2020, many Finnish women shared pictures of themselves in a jacket that reveals the chest to show their support to the Prime Minister Sanna Marin who was shamed for wearing such a jacket in a picture series for an interview. Without knowing the context, the pictures could appear as fashion statements or everyday selfies. More interestingly, this and other similar cases in the social media demonstrate that contributions to the public debate always do not have to be in the form of a written text, but can be pictures, performances, videos, voice, etc.

To note here, due to the changes the internet-based media has brought to the public debate, one could even argue that there is no proper public debate. The media space is somewhat splintered, and the media which functions as the space for the debate is mostly commercial. Nevertheless, the central characteristics attributed to the public sphere by Habermas (1974), such as the openness to follow and to participate in the debate (and the public visibility of the debates and the contributors, see Arendt, 1998), are still present in the current media-based debate (see Kreide, 2016). One is free to follow the public debates, and due to the enlarged possibilities brought by the internet, there are more opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate (this is not all unproblematic, though, especially when it comes to social media companies, algorithms, etc., but I will come back to this in the next section). Even the commerciality of the current media spaces is not a problem as long as they are, in principle, open for all, if we follow Habermas's argument. As he argues, before the era of the mass media and the internet, pubs and cafés—commercial spaces—have served as the platforms for public debates (Habermas, 1974). Thus, the fact that many media spaces are commercial does not make them any less open to the public, even if the commerciality could be problematic in other ways. The internet has thus altered but clearly not erased the media-based public debate, but quite the opposite, both in its good and bad effects on the debate, such as wider access but also the rapidity of the reactions in the debate.

Political polarization

The media-based public debate and polarization often is argued to be linked in one way or another (see Barberá, 2020; Sunstein, 2018). What is meant by the term "polarization" here is political polarization, roughly put, a division into distinct opposites in the political sphere, a state in which the opinions, beliefs, or interests of a group or society no longer range along a continuum but become concentrated at opposing extremes. I look at this phenomenon in the context of the media-based public debate, that is, in what is said, how, and what is associated with what is explicated. In other words, how meaning is constituted in the debate: simply put, in a debate among a homogeneous group, meanings would be constituted similarly, particular expressions implying similar things to multiple people. In a polarized situation, in turn, the same expressions imply different things for people belonging in different social-political groups. For example, in a discussion about climate change, a statement about forestry would seem to some as ignorant and to others as being on their side, and not as something that is about the shared project of enduring the society.

Within academic and public debates, it is popular to argue that media and especially digital technologies foster political polarization by their ability to foster the emergence of echo chambers, where extremist ideas are amplified. For instance, Sunstein (2018), a leading proponent of this view, argues that the main characteristic of social networking sites is that they allow politically likeminded individuals to find one another. In this environment, citizens are only exposed to information that reinforces their political views and remain isolated from other individuals with opposing views, in part due to the filtering effects of ranking algorithms that generate filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011) and create incentives for publishers to share clickbait and hyper-partisan content (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018). The outcome of this process is a society that is increasingly segregated along partisan lines and where compromise becomes unlikely due to rising mistrust of public officials, media outlets, and ordinary citizens on the other side of the ideological spectrum.

As Barberá (2020) and Dubois and Blank (2018) argue, however, despite this apparent consensus, there is no evident direct link between the media-based debates and political polarization. Dubois and Blank's empirical study shows that the idea of an echo chamber is overstated: Media users tend to encounter more different people in media than in their daily lives outside media (Dubois & Blank, 2018). Other empirical research suggests that cross-cutting interactions in media, especially social media, are more frequent than commonly believed (Barberá, Jost et al., 2015) and ranking algorithms do not have a large impact on the ideological balance of news consumption on Facebook or Google (Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic, 2015; Haim, Graefe, and Brosius, 2018).

As Barberá (2020) argues, the fact that media, especially social media, increase exposure to diverse political ideas does not necessarily mean it has no effect on political polarization. The results of empirical research are, however, even mutually contradictory; Mutz (2006) shows that repeated exposure to cross-cutting information leads to political moderation, which could explain why political polarization (in the United States) has actually increased the least among those citizens who are least likely to use social media (see also Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro, 2017). However, this finding is challenged by arguments that it is precisely this increased exposure to cross-cutting views that may be

having polarizing effects (Bail et al., 2018; Suhay, Bello-Pardo, and Maurer, 2018). For instance, Settle (2018) identifies the heightened awareness of political identities in social media as a key factor driving affective polarization (see also Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). What we can conclude at this point is that political polarization might relate to media-based public debates, but there is no clear evidence that media-based public debates necessarily increase polarization. Rather, as I will argue next, media-based debates also might have alternative effects, that is, media users also might learn from others by media-based discussions.

Learning by media-based public debates

As the internet allows more possibilities for participation in the debates, the possibilities to learn from other members of the society in the media-based public debates are even wider than in the pre-internet era. Learning from others in the public debate mostly is informal learning, a situation in which the subjects do not concentrate on learning but rather on the primary activity, such as following or contributing to the debates, but still come to possess something new (views, values, skills, understanding, etc.) by engaging in the activity (Merriam & Bierema, 2013; see also Field, 2015). This kind of learning can even be accidental and unnoticed. For example, by recognising the jacket pictures related to the case of Sanna Marin in social media, one might realise the difference in how male and female politicians are treated in the public, without thinking that one is now learning something. Thereby we as both collectives and individuals can acquire information, ideas, or values, and thereby can come to understand something and to relate to the environing society in a new way (see Habermas, 1981).

A difference to a mere change in the subject's positions here is that learning often is characterised as reflective in that when one experiences learning, one is aware of the change in the sense of experiencing the change, and approves it either explicitly or implicitly, thus experiencing the change as gaining something (Marton, 2015). For instance, forgetting as a change in the subject's positions in the sense of losing skills or knowledge one had before, would not be considered learning, because in such a change nothing is gained approvingly, even though the subject would be aware of the change. The learning experience is normative in this sense: One feels one possesses something more and/or better than one did before, even if one did not explicate the situation as "learning" to oneself. The experience of learning does not have to be explicated, but it can be felt, for instance, as a happy feeling for finally mastering a skill or understanding something better than previously. However, the experience of learning in this sense is not dependent on the actual truthfulness or accuracy of the content that is acquired. A person might experience gaining something reflectively, that is, experience learning, while according to someone else or some objective metrics the person might have acquired false information, wrong values, or misunderstood something. If the person genuinely believes the content – skills, information, values, etc. – is accurate, that is, approves the gain of the content, the experience would by definition be an experience of learning.

Learning from other members of the society in the media-based public debate is a kind of learning by discussion. In such learning situations, we learn from others' contributions that more or less differ from our current positions (Bridges, 1979). This results in our acquiring particular knowledge, values, or views

from them or a better understanding of the societal situation in general. Learning in this way does not mean that one necessarily agrees with others, but rather that one can, for instance, come to understand where another person or group is coming from (Wahl, 2018). That is, even though I utilize Habermas's definition of the public sphere, I do not agree with all of his views, such as his ideal of consensus in the public debate. Rather, when it comes to learning from public debates, I think that the Mouffean argument critical of the consensus-view, the idea that democratic society never reaches a full consensus on any thematic matter (see e.g., Mouffe, 2005; 2013), is worthwhile as well. However, I consider such arguments about the ideals of the public sphere as hypotheses and do not take a stand in either direction. We might define a change in one's understanding as learning from others both in cases that result in a consensus and in the cases that do not.

As learning from others in the media-based public debate might include coming to understand other persons' feelings and sympathising with them as well as coming to understand their rational arguments, learning cannot be characterised as something related merely to rational or propositional knowledge. Rather, following Meyer-Drawe's (2008) argumentation, learning experience is a multifaceted situation through which one's relation to the surrounding society changes, more or less. As Maiese (2017) argues along the same lines that learning can be understood as a wholesome alteration in the subject's cognitive-affective orientation to their surroundings, such as the society. For example, as a result of public debates on sexual violence, the followers and the contributors might experience a change in their attitude towards accusations of sexual harassment; they might feel differently about such accusations or the harassment, and/or they might start to take such accusations more seriously. To sum up, learning from others in a discussion is a complex situation, where one reflectively acquires something new from other discussants or the discussion in general, in a way one feels one possesses something more or better than one did before.

Learning and polarization

Following the arguments concerning polarization and echo chambers presented above, we might encounter many from whom to learn in media-based public debates. What is important here, though, is that learning in the way described above does not mean that one necessarily agrees with others, but rather that one can, for instance, come to understand where another person or group is coming from (Wahl, 2018). We could define a change in one's understanding as learning from others both in the cases that result in a consensus among the participants and in the cases that do not.

Another important point here is that learning is not – or should not, at least – be defined by the content, that is, by what is learned. This means that the same contents learned might for some seem problematic, while another person might think the person understands something more than before. One might oneself have an experience of learning from others, that is, to have reflectively through questioning one's current position have acquired something from someone else's views or on a more general level, but another person might think the person is led false. For example, someone pro EU might not think another person has learnt anything, when the person learns facts based on which she becomes negative about the EU. But, such preferences concerning the content are not really relevant in the question whether something can be called learning or not. In other words, the definition of learning is not, after

all, a question of truth or, for instance, morals. There are contents that can be learned, such as values or skills, that have no truth value, and, especially in the case of skills, even no meaningful moral value. Rather, learning is a certain kind of situation of acquiring something, and the truth value, moral value, or practical value of the content does not as such make the act learning or non-learning.

Here, we come to the point where we see that learning from others by the media-based public debate is not opposite to polarization. Rather, these two phenomena might very well exist simultaneously. Two people might learn a lot from others in the media-based public debate, and precisely learn and not merely imitate or acquire without a questioning and reflective take, but they might learn contents that are quite opposite. They might even learn from each other, but not sympathise with each other any more than before.

We might even come to understand the points someone else is making without agreeing with them and feel even hostile towards them. That is, understanding does not necessarily equal consensus and not even sympathy. For example, a person pro EU might – hypothetically – very well understand the mind set and the situation of someone voting for an anti-EU politician, or even of that politician itself, but the person's understanding of the mind set and the background of the anti-EU politician or their voters does not necessarily make the person feel sympathetic towards them. Assuming the opposite here would include rather strong claims about the human nature or necessities about communication (cf. Habermas, 1981). Instead, the person might even feel even more disgusted and hostile towards the political group after learning about their views. Thus, learning from others does not necessarily include positive feelings towards the person or persons. As mentioned, Settle (2018) and Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) have even argued that the heightened awareness of political identities, that is, coming to better understand the views of another party and the differences between one's and the others' views or identities, might be a driving force for affective polarization. In other words, in such cases, learning from others in the sense of learning about them might even foster polarization, not reduce it.

Most importantly, learning from others in the media-based public debate does not mean that we would learn from those we fundamentally disagree with. We might as well learn from those we already share some values or world views with, and thus even the whole society might be very learning in the media-based debates, but the contents the members of the society learn might be separated in different value groups and even world views. For example, feminists might learn from the queer society how to be more inclusive and mindful of different identities related to gender or sexual identities, while remaining hostile towards conservatives, and vice versa. In this way, too, learning by the media-based public debates might even deepen polarization, as people in different groups would learn from those they are not opposed to and thereby move further away from another group of the members of the society. If polarization is a problem in the society, then learning from others in the media-based public debate is not necessarily something that would solve the problem.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the media-based public debate might provide a space for learning from others. While this is an alternative to potential problems of the media-based debates, such as political

polarization, learning from others and polarization by the debates might not be mutually exclusive possibilities. Rather, learning from others in the media-based public debate might sometimes even increase polarization, even though in other cases, it also might have a decreasing effect to political polarization. The increase of the possibilities to participate in the media-based public and semi-public debates might enable multiple phenomena, including the sharing of misinformation or polarization. By learning from others in the debates, we might gain a better understanding about what is going on in the society, but we might not agree with particular groups or feel sympathetic to them. For instance, one might learn facts about others, but not acquire the other group's values. To conclude, learning as such does not do away or exclude polarization.

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Fake news, populism, polarisation, and emotions in Brazil COVID-19 narratives

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Abstract

Contents checked by the fact-checking agency Lupa about new coronavirus pandemic and labeled as false were submitted to the following analysis methods: 1) Content analysis. 2) Emotional semiotics. 3) Relationship to political facts. The objective was to analyze the fake news narratives about the new coronavirus during the pandemic crisis in Brazil and its political relations, mainly with Bolsonaro's populist government and how they managed to convince the population to go against measures recommended by science. The findings were evidence of affective polarisation encouraged by contents that evoked mainly outrage and anger. These affects would help shape the identity of Bolsonaro's supporter groups, find other members, and increase internal radicalism, in a populist tactic that it would reinforce the agenda defended by the Brazilian President.

Key words: fake news, coronavirus, populism, polarisation, politics

Introduction

Much has been said about the politicization of the new coronavirus pandemic, the major health crisis of our century. In Brazil, the federal government minimized the disease (FOCO, 2020), governors and mayors have taken actions to combat (CNN, 2020) and prevention following the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, while the President defended the return to work (COLETTA, 2020) and criticized social isolation (Valfré, 2020), and parliamentarians were responsible for the project of financial emergency aid to the population (Roubicek, 2020). Bolsonaro (Brazilian President) encouraged the use of hydroxychloroquine (Fernandes, 2020), a medicine without any scientific evidence of effectiveness. Thus, the polarisation seen in the 2018 elections was perpetuated in the digital space of social networks, with several groups politically disputing the narrative. And the question remains: how can a narrative that opposes science gain adherence? Even more in a time of a health crisis.

On 11th March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by WHO (PAHO, 2020). At the end of the same month, the director-general of WHO warned: “We are not just fighting an epidemic; we are fighting an infodemic” (OPAS, 2020), referring to the excess of information, which would make it difficult to distinguish what would be reliable or not, including fake news. The first case of the new coronavirus in

Brazil occurred in February (G1, 2020). According to John Hopkins University Data (https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html), Brazil had more than 408 thousand deaths and 14 million infected people. Worldwide, there was over 3 million deaths and 153 million infected by the time this paper was being written.

There is an ecosystem of misinformation in Brazil. Perhaps the emergency of the facts, with population's life at risk, obligates us to study more seriously what happens in the country. Therefore, the research problem we want to answer is: what are the discursive strategies used in Brazilian fake news about the new coronavirus, in order to convince the population to oppose the scientific technical discourse?

Literature review

First, it is necessary to explain our choice by the term "fake news" instead of "disinformation/misinformation". Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, p. 213) define "'fake news' to be news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers." However, Trump appropriated the term "fake news" to label the news that were critical to his government, what was followed by other populist leaders around the world (Albright, 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Believing that the term did not include the complex phenomenon of informational disorder, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) proposed new terminologies: 1) "Mis-information", when false information is shared, but the damage caused is not intentional; 2) "Dis-information", when false information is known to be shared to cause harm; 3) "Mal-information", when, finally, information is shared with the objective of causing damage. We have chosen the term "fake news" on this paper because it is best known to the general public; despite of the confusion about its meaning, often being linked only to bad press work, related to news that are not trustworthy (Nielsen & Graves, 2017).

In 2018 (when Bolsonaro President was elected) voters split between pro-Lula and pro-Bolsonaro groups (left wing against right wing) (Resende m.fl., 2018). Fuks and Marques (2020) argue that polarisation was more affective than ideological and it occurred mainly among right wing voters. Regarding affective polarisation, the authors explain that it occurs when there is an increase in disaffection between rival groups, and it may be related to political leaders and aversion to rival candidates (Fuks & Marques, 2020). This affective polarisation seems to remain to these days.

Jasper (2018) argues that we think we have made a mistake, we feel ashamed; but if we find someone or another group to blame, our feeling is of anger or outrage. Finding someone to blame is an important component in creating a collective identity, which allows us to differentiate between "us" and "them". And this outrage both helps to recruit new members to the group and empowers participants to become more radical (Jasper, 2018). The creation of the common enemy is one of the tactics of populism, according to Gerbaudo (2018), which can be used by left or right. Traditional media is seen as hiding the truth, involved with the financial interests of the elite and the establishment's politics, so digital channels are seen as a means of giving a voice to the people. Social media also provided the formation of these groups and their mobilization (Gerbaudo, 2018).

In May 2020, Bolsonaro made a post saying that the respiratory diseases death tolls in Ceará had decreased then, which was classified as disinformation by Instagram (Soares, 2020). Journalist

Masha Gessen (2016) says that russian President Vladimir Putin lies are told for the same reason as Trump's, from the USA: "They demonstrate power over the truth itself". Then she adds: "Putin's power lies in saying what he wants, when he wants, regardless of the facts. He is the President of his country and the king of reality" (Kakutani, 2018, s. 119). Which may also help explain Bolsonaro's attitudes.

Technology also encourages other phenomena, such as ideological echo chambers through computational algorithms. Based on a logic of personalization, the platforms only present us with content that we like or agree with (guided by our likes, comments, shares, previous searches, among others), with no space for divergencies or views that question our world views and beliefs, in a kind of automatic curation, in order to reinforce our opinions and beliefs (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Parisier, 2012; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). However, social media cannot be considered as the only factor for political polarisation, once it occurs even during mass media consumption and social media allow individuals to be exposed to ideological diverse content shared by their friends (Nguyen & Vu, 2019).

Digital also enables fast and comprehensive sharing, including viralizing information, in a logic of many to many, "mass self-communication", as conceptualized by Castells (2011, 2015). It is opposed to mass communication and, therefore, does not use traditional media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc.) and is characterized by being unidirectional, which means that it is sent from one transmitter to several receivers.

Bonow Soares et al. (2021) found that fake news worked as a smokescreen in order to hide a Bolsonaro government political crisis. They were connected to the alt-right's political discourse and sought to minimize the pandemic, to frame it politically, as well as to harm Bolsonaro's opponents. Various methods were used to shape the narrative in favor of the current government and attack its enemies.

Fake news is much older than social networks, howbeit we understand that digital ends up potentialize the phenomenon. It is needed to clarify that we do not understand disinformation as a kind of technological determinism, in which, similar to the hypodermic needle theory, public opinion is inert (França & Simões, 2016). Anyway, we think that just as advertising has its persuasive techniques, so does disinformation, and there are specificities in the Brazilian case that are worth studying.

The general objective of this paper is to analyze the fake news narratives about the new coronavirus during the pandemic crisis in Brazil and its political relations, mainly with Bolsonaro's populist government.

Hypothesis 1: Fake news would be a response (or counter-narrative) to the current news and an expansion of the bolsonarism network narrative, in the form of reinforcing the President's discourse (even going against scientific technical knowledge), defending him, and persecuting his political enemies.

Hypothesis 2: Emotions arouse are aligned with populism tactics and lead to an affective polarisation.

Method

Lupa agency database was used (https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/lupa/). The company was the first fact-checking specialized in Brazil. As a criterion for sample selection, we have chosen:

- From 3 November 2020 (when the pandemic was declared by WHO) to 8 November 2020.
- Hashtag " #Veremos editorial"

The headline should have the following keywords: COVID-19, COVID, pandemic, new coronavirus, coronavirus, and quarantine.

For the analysis undertaken, it must be said that when there were two texts in the same publication, coming from different media channels (such as Facebook and Instagram, e. g.), but they were together because both belonged to the same subject, they were divided into two different publications for analysis. In addition, only texts that had been labeled by the fact-checking agency as "false" were considered. There were 397 publications in the period, and we restricted the analysis to 174 contents only.

The *corpus* was submitted to the following steps of analysis: 1) Content analysis; 2) Emotional semiotics; 3) Relationship to political facts. All of them will be further detailed.

Content analysis

As proposed by Bardin (1977), the following phases were considered as basis for the analysis: a) organization of the analysis; b) coding; c) categorization; d) treatment of results, inference and interpretation of results (Urquiza & Marques, 2016). Therefore, the collected database was submitted to analysis using the MAXQDA software (https://www.maxqda.com/brasil/).

Emotional semiotics

We will use the Emotional Semiotics to analyze emoticons (Casadei & Loureiro, 2020), using the following markers (Figueiredo, 2012):

1) Phonetic procedures: onomatopoeia.

2) Prosodic procedures: the pace of sentences.

3) Speech markers and mimo-gestural indexes: interruptions and silences.

4) Interjections: present the emotion.

5) Exclamations and exclamatory statements: that can be understood as markers of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

6) Mitigation procedures: form of social conduct at the service courtesy and strategy linked to the interlocutor relationship.

7) Diminutive and augmentative suffix: attenuation and affectivity strategy (diminutive) and expression of greatness or derogation (augmentative), or even, intensification or de-intensification.

8) Deontic and epistemic modality: first person usage to express personal opinion.

9) Vocabulary and tropes: words that transparently describe emotions.

Next, we will analyze the *corpus* from a vocabulary and tropes analysis perspective, in order to try to understand the emotions that arose, just as we did in the master's dissertation (Casadei & Loureiro, 2020). We won't apply the analysis to all the 174 contents, but one or many texts per category that we think would help to understand the emotions evocated.

Relationship to political facts

We would try to understand if the fake news had a connection with the political events, once we know some of Bolsonaro's strategies are smokescreens or persecuting political opponents. For this purpose, the website search tool of Folha de S.Paulo newspaper (one of the biggest newspapers in Brazil) was used. As filters: "pandemic" term; same period as fake news; restricted to the Politics editorial. We choose a headline per day that seemed better linked to the fake news period.

Analysis

Content analysis

The contents were categorized into five distinct categories:

Content division by categories

Category	Explanation	Number of Occurrences
Misleading media	Media tries to manipulate us, but it will not succeed.	13
Pandemic and Covid denial; we have better recommendations than WHO	The pandemic doesn't exist, Covid was developed by China, miracle ways to cure and unproven drugs usage, incentive like hydroxychloroquine, chloroquine and ivermectin. It also challenges WHO's recommendations as wearing masks and social isolation, as well as vaccines (including 5G will control humanity conspiracy theory).	105
Quarantine doesn't work and impacts economy negatively	There is also content about criminals who are benefited and citizens who suffer an Injustice matter. Incentives to just isolate the elderly.	27
Pandemic politicization	They talk about politicians, there is even content defending that Bolsonaro was persecuted. It says that São Paulo governor (who opposes the Brazilian President) would be a "dictator". It also has content in the sense of "taking advantage of the pandemic for corruption".	62

Others (schemes and optimistic narratives)	Many companies started offering free services at the beginning of the pandemic. So, some groups started producing fake content in this sense to scams people. Also, in this category there are more hopeful content, which seeks to say that we are overcoming the pandemic or that it would make us better people (a type of content that was common when the health crisis had just been decreed by WHO).	21

Table 1 Source: developed with MAXQDA software by the author.

Each content was not classified in just one category, but in more than one, depending on the content. For example, let us say that in a text there was reference to misleading media, but also how much President Bolsonaro was persecuted and still an allusion that the pandemic was false. So, this one should be put into three different categories: “Misleading media”; “Pandemic and Covid denial; we have better recommendations than WHO”; “Pandemic politicization”.

It is possible visually understand the number of messages for each category by the Image 1.

Content division by categories

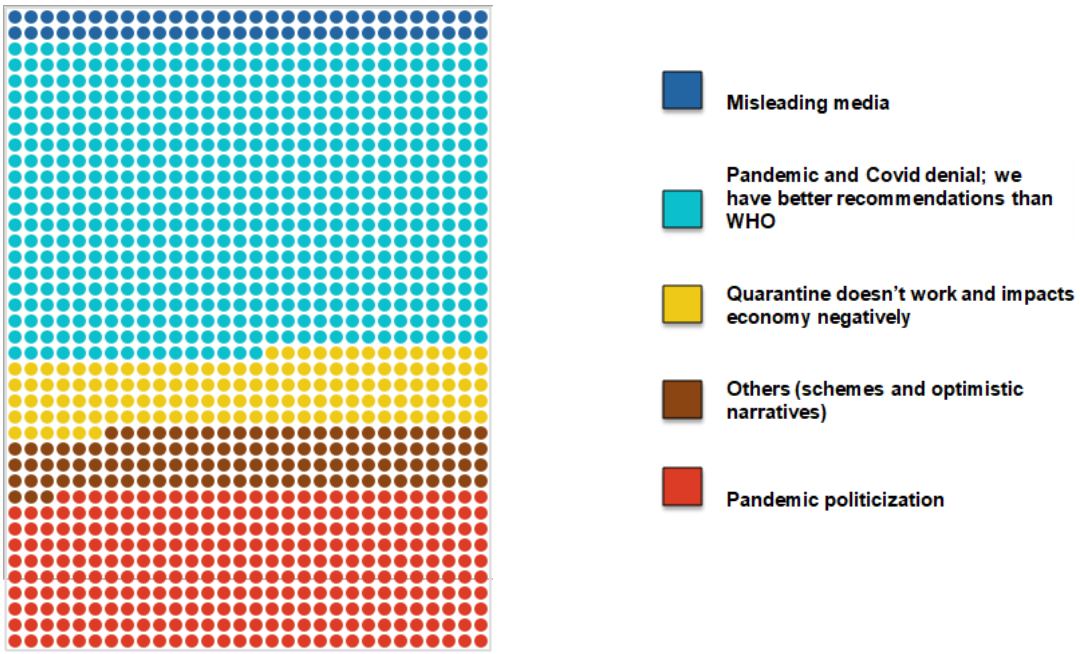

Image 1 Source: developed with MAXQDA software by the author.

Emotional Semiotics

1. Fake news "Pandemic and Covid denial; we have better recommendations than WHO" category.

In this category we have many of a conspiratorial nature, such as that the virus would exist long before the pandemic, or that it would have been created in the laboratory, "*MAN WHO SOLD THE CORONA VIRUS IN CHINA, IN PRISON. The US has just discovered the man who made and sold the Corona virus to China. Dr Charles Lieber, head of the chemistry and biology department at Harvard University, USA. He was just arrested today, according to sources in the American department*."; that deaths from other causes were being considered as Covid. It is said that there is corruption behind the high numbers of deaths by Covid. The empty coffins fall into this category and empty hospitals. Also, narratives that vaccines would modify genes or the indication of miraculous prescriptions or medicine without scientific proof for treatment of the new coronavirus as Hydroxychloroquine or even tea. Messages discredit official organizations like WHO and journalism, as if a truth is being hidden from the population. As we are all under a worldwide conspiracy and that is why they can only trust each other. In other words, there seems to be a tone of outrage.

2. Fake news "Misleading media" category.

The text is "*DO YOU KNOW WHY GLOBO DID IT? Globo is showing images of people being killed by Covid-19. But, it was the Lampeduza shipwreck tragedy that killed 130 people in 2013*". Like the previous category, it is believed by the conspiracy theory that the death tolls by Covid-19 are inflated. Here, anger and/or outrage is against to the country leading broadcaster, which often is remembered by the term "That Globo doesn't show" on social networks, due to some subject's disappearance in their news, according to public opinion. The use of capital letters in the beginning of the text sounds like a shout in the internet language, therefore, it shows anger and outrage in the first sentence. And it requires the reader to take part in the outrage / anger by asking the reason why the broadcaster hides this type of information. In other words, reader and author are together in this question of outrage against the TV broadcast. Sometimes there is a defence of Bolsonaro, and the television network is known for criticizing him. In other words, both television and WHO are discredited on the account of spreading the threats of the virus (and advocating selfcare, according to WHO recommendations).

3. Fake news "Quarantine doesn't work and impacts economy negatively" category.

"*A detainee released for coronavirus fear is arrested with a large number of drugs and weapons*", in which the detainee is released due to the coronavirus infection possibility and is arrested again with drugs and weapons, that is, it becomes a danger to the population, in a logic that puts the individual concern in opposition to the collective. Something like criminals benefit while good citizens suffer during the pandemic. The narrative used is that the quarantine doesn't work, as in this case: "*A research with more than 60 thousand people in Spain shows the ineffectiveness of quarantines. The study showed a lower incidence of contagion by Covid-19 among active workers who are exercising their professional*

activity normally and leaving home every day". Additionally, that it would lead citizens to economic despair. Again, it is the citizens (the good citizen) in a fight against the system (TV and WHO), which want to see him starve to death. Here it seems that courage (as opposed to fear) is exalted, perhaps even with a dose of sacrifice, that it is necessary to leave the house and make economy round, that it is not possible to follow WHO's recommendations.

4. Fake news "Pandemic politicization" category.

The text is "*Deputy opened his mouth. What the people already suspected… He confirmed, 19 thousand per death*". It is emphasized again that there would be an interest in inflating deaths from coronavirus, in an involvement with corruption. In many cases, it relates to the government of São Paulo (in a way that separates it from Bolsonaro): "*EVERY DEATH BY COVID - THE STATE [of São Paulo] RECEIVES $ 16,450 REAIS. (We don't even need to explain anything, right?)*". The severity of the disease is also reduced, there are many texts that seem to say that President Bolsonaro is persecuted, while Dória, São Paulo governor, an opponent of Bolsonaro is seen as the "dictator" or someone who wants to overthrow the President. More than that, he would not let people work, unlike the President. Once more, it seems that the feeling is of outrage against government officials who would not let the citizens work, would take advantage of the pandemic scenario, and still persecute Bolsonaro, appointed as a savior of all issues.

5. Fake news "Others (schemes and optimistic narratives)" category.

The text is "*Great! Great! 2 hospitals in Jerusalem are closed because they no longer have patients with Covid-19. Look at the joy*." In this category are posts that do not fit in the previous ones: schemes that try to deceive its readers, with publications similar to those of large companies which at the beginning of the pandemic sought to offer free services; or optimistic content, claiming that we are defeating the pandemic, or the crisis is making us better people. The content presented falls into the latter category. The joy and satisfaction presented are shown by the two exclamations followed, including the author saying, "*look at the joy*". It talks about hospitals being closed because there are no more patients in Jerusalem (what is false). Many of the messages in this category indicate we're becoming better people due to the disease, in the sense that we start paying attention to what is important. On the other hand, there are schemes, which try to take advantage of the wave of free services offered by companies at the beginning of the pandemic.

Relationship to political facts

Finally, we sought to understand whether there was a relation between the fake news and politician fact of the day, to confirm that they would serve as a smokescreen for Bolsonaro government. We investigated the top three-day headlines with the largest number of shared fake news to confirm whether there was such a relationship to political facts, but this correlation was not

found. However, if we abandon the date issue, it is possible to realize that there is a relationship between the two phenomena.

The headline "*Hate and anti-democratic discourses should be punished, says Alexandre de Moraes*" refers to a speech by one of the ministers from Supreme Federal Court (STF). He refers to hate, and anti-democratic speeches propagated on social networks, often by bolsonaristas, that is, supporters of the Brazilian President. We understand that the following fake news would talk to this headline: "*Brazil is the only country in the world where the Supreme Court snatched away the President from fighting the pandemic and handed over the country's powers to governors and mayors who are not committed to the nation's destiny AND THEY DID EVERYTHING WRONG. Many of them even robbed and withdrew the money destined to save Brazilians lives*". Misinformation widespread goes far beyond that, because it also refers to the fact that the STF gave autonomy to governors and mayors to act in favor of taking sanitary measures, since the federal government preferred to deny the disease severity. Even so, we understand that there is a counter-narrative that seeks to delegitimize STF. We found at least 16 correlations.

Regarding not matching dates, what can explain is that fake news needs to be reported to the Lupa system to be checked. Therefore, it is quite likely that there will be a delay between your circulation and checking, especially since the checking work can take many hours or days. That said, we can presume that hypothesis 2 is correct, due to many of the fake news in circulation work as a counter-narrative or there is the suggestion that it sometimes constitute a smokescreen.

Results

In the present paper, we raised the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: at first, it seemed that it was not a counter-narrative, as the dates did not match. However, if divided by subject, that is, political headline apart from fake news, it seemed that it was really a counter-narrative, with a possible hint of a smokescreen. Two factors need to be remembered: 1) Fake news need to be reported to Lupa Agency to be checked; 2) There is a limited number of checkers and checks that are done per day. Therefore, this would explain the lack of relation between the date and the categories of the contents and their relation when divided by themes.

Hypothesis 2: almost all categories seem to show outrage and anger, in the sense that the group will not let itself be deceived, either by the media, or by WHO, other times by leftists, in a relationship to antilabor party. There is a group identified here, so they can only trust each other. They see Bolsonaro as being persecuted; while their political opponents, such as "DitaDória" (like dictator Dória, São Paulo governor), STF, mayors and governors would be the villains, who take advantage of the pandemic to steal and do not understand that the measures of distance and social isolation harm the population financially, who need to work. There is even an exhortation to a kind of bravery, which would be to go against the rules of WHO, that is, not to be afraid of death and to demonstrate that all this is an international conspiracy.

In other words, it seems to demonstrate that there is a division between “us” and “them”, which feeds an affective polarisation, as explained by Fuks and Marques (2020), which would have occurred in the 2018 elections. Thus, the disaffection against the rival group is maintained, but here it seems that it is expanded, it goes beyond antilabor party to include all of those who oppose Bolsonaro. There is also a relation to the Emotions Sociology (Jasper, 2018), in which when we blame another group when we feel angry and outrage, in addition to creating a collective identity. This outrage still allows us to recruit new members and further radicalize the discourse, since the creation of a common enemy is one of populism practices (Gerbaudo, 2018).

It is also important to say that the categories: 1) Misleading media; 2) Pandemic and Covid denial; we have better recommendations than WHO; 3) Quarantine does not work and impacts economy negatively; 4) Pandemic politicization. These are agendas defended by President Bolsonaro. Thus, there seems to be a relationship or narrative that seeks to reaffirm the flags raised by the President and to persecute his political enemies, and, probably, to increase President’s support group identity.

Conclusion

This paper points to a possible relationship between the pandemic, fake news, and Bolsonaro government. The same strategies used during the 2018 election campaign, seem to be used during the pandemic period, tactics that tend to persecute the President's political disaffections. Smokescreens and counter-narratives are also employed to try to convince his supporters to go against WHO and science recommendations.

For that, affections are mobilized to create an affective polarisation and a group identity that develops a division between "them" and "us". Emotions mobilized are mainly of anger and outrage against political opponents such as governors and mayors, and Supreme Court; as well as the media and WHO. All seen as deceivers. Only group members would know the truth: pandemic would be an international conspiracy, which would allow, among other issues, corruption. They also believe that measures of social isolation would be ineffective and economically damaging. Here even a hint of courage arises, to demonstrate that would be necessary to have courage to face danger: the virus.

To sum up, both affections, anger and outrage, would sustain populism, and collaborate to foster a group identity. The provoked indignation would allow increase the internal radicalism, as well as it would dialogue with the agendas of interest of the Brazilian president.

This study presents some indications that deserve further investigation.

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For a Genealogy of Suspension: Biopolitics and Health Crises in Brazil in Three Moments

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Abstract

This paper is part of an ongoing doctoral research, which seeks to investigate how State management discursivizes three major health crises that have affected the Brazilian territory over three centuries. Namely: the outbreak of yellow fever that occurred in the 1850s; the Spanish flu crisis, which spread in the country in 1918; and the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus, which arrives in Brazil in 2020. The articulation between the three events is carried out from an archaeological and genealogical perspective and aims to understand which knowledge-power regimes that are sustained by the voices that undertake crisis coping policies. With this, we seek to identify the continuities and, above all, the discontinuities of the changes in the dynamics of the management of space and bodies - it is, therefore, an exercise of excavating the past and diagnosing the present. In this work, we point out how there are approaches to the ways of managing and discursivizing Covid-19 with ways of managing and discursivizing in the past, as an exercise in a precarious biopolitics, i.e., a management incident on the life it produces precariousness; as well as an ideological use of the disease, revealed in the political crisis management; however, we also believe that there are processes that mark the uniqueness of our time, such as multiple antagonisms - the virus was not established as an antagonistic reference par excellence – and a strong denial about the status of the crisis.

Keywords: discourse, pandemics, biopolitics, necropolitics, governmentality

Introduction

This essay looks at three events: (1) the outbreak of yellow fever in the 1850s; (2) the Spanish flu crisis, which spread throughout the country in 1918; (3) and the 2020 pandemic caused by the new coronavirus. Unique events in scale and incidence, but which show the management of bodies and spaces in contexts of health crisis, and which we propose to observe with and beyond the lens of biopolitics, from the discursive materialities that communicate and constitute them (Foucault, 2012). Here, therefore, I point out some preliminary findings.

The articulation between the three events is carried out through an archaeological and genealogical perspective. I.e., an approach which seeks to understand what are the regimes of power-knowledge that are sustained in the voices that manage public policies over an expanded temporality;

bearing in mind that crisis management is always political. In addition, the act of going back to the past seem essential to the understanding of who we are today. In the wake of Foucault's thought, when we perceive the past, we seek to reflect both on what defines us in our uniqueness (therefore, what exists of discontinuity) and on what seems to constitute us. In this sense, it consists of an exercise of understanding the present.

It is, therefore, about seeking to reflect on three events, over three centuries of Brazilian history, which played an important modulating role in space and in the management of lives, being of particular interest to me the discourse conveyed by the official voices, produced by the imperial bureaucracy, by the republican nation-state and reverberated in the press.

Besides, I delve on events that, for the time being, I call “suspension”, as I believe they are an interesting interpretative key of the social, since they reveal both an intensification of ordinary political agencies, and the appearance of exceptional conducts. By "suspension" I mean not a radical rupture, but temporary inflexible moments of transfiguration of a current state, which may (or may not) turn history into what it is no longer.

I work with the hypothesis that precarious biopolitics (Foucault, 2018) is still underway in Brazil. That is, a life management that produces precariousness, either due to the unequal distribution of the most qualified life-producing policies, or the absence of State intervention or even its active presence. A process that seems to be strongly evidenced in crisis situations, and that seems to have intensified in recent years; but that has been constituting us for a long time.

Biopolitics, necropolitics and power dynamics

To reflect on ways of discursivize and manage epidemic crises in the urban space leads us commonly to the Foucaultian notion of biopolitics. A historical modality of power, exercised mainly after the 18th century from the rationalization of the problems posed by governmental practice. Until then, mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, power techniques were seen to be especially centered on the individual body, materialized in the procedures that sought to ensure the spatial distribution of these bodies (their separation, their alignment, their placement in surveillance), the production of a whole field of visibility and the techniques that aimed to increase their useful strength (Foucault, 2018). In turn, biopower does not exclude techniques that affect the individual body, but partially integrate and modify them. They are also effectively encrusted thanks to previous disciplinary techniques.

It is, therefore, power on the body-species, indispensable for the development of capitalism, since it guarantees the insertion of bodies in the production apparatus and produces an adjustment of population phenomena to economic (Foucault, 2014). It is the power which makes people live and let them die. In other words, it is the power to produce, incite and regulate life and to expose to death and multiply, for some, its risks. Its terminal form is the sovereignty of the State - not being limited to it[1]. It is power that deals with the population as a problem that is both scientific and political: a biological and a power problem. The observation, analysis and intervention on this species-body are some of its principles (Foucault, 2018).

It is, thus, a concept with a wide heuristic scope that seeks to make evident the nature of the varied forms of governance over the lives of populations, in their continuities and discontinuities; and that constitutes our historical form of subjectivity, being exercised not only on the “exterior” of our lives, but also modulates and produces us (Foucault, 2014). In addition, in order to carry out this investigation, I share Daniele Lorenzini's understanding that the biopolitical practises consist of a differential vulnerability policy. Far from being a policy that erases inequalities – based on the category of population, which fits us in the same biological species –, biopolitics depends structurally on the establishment of hierarchies in the value of lives, “producing and multiplying vulnerability as a means of governing people” (Lorenzini, 2020, p.7). In other words, biopolitics would imply a power that also operates for the production of precarious lives, set aside from policies aimed at strengthening their productive capacity and protecting their existence.

Márcia Leite (2020), on the other hand, argues that the biopolitical exercise in Brazil has unique characteristics. In addition to the perception of biopolitics as a differential policy, the author suggests the existence of a biopolitics of precariousness – something that can be seen in a wide exercise in Brazil of pandemic management (and not only). The author is aware of the fact that differential management occurs not only due to an absence of the State, but also due to its presence. In its terms, a biopolitics that “make live” precariously by the absence of the State; and “make die” by its active presence (Leite, 2020, p. 4). As she argues, there are a series of government agencies in progress that have deepened historical precariousness and that have been producing subjectivities consistent with this management, in the sense of conducting conduct or self-government (Foucault, 2010).

The argument of Lorenzini (2020) and Leite (2020) about a biopolitical pratice which produces vulnerability is markedly explained by Foucault in his last class in “In defense of society”, when he presents extreme situations (Nazism, and colonial genocide, for example) and points them out as forms of State racism. A policy that differentially exposes human beings to risks and a mechanism of sovereignty within the proper functioning of biopolitics, in which racism ensures the function of death in the biopolitical economy, a kind of condition of acceptability of a differential exposure of lives (Foucault, 2018, p.217).

Despite the biopolitical key providing us an interesting subside for reflection on crisis management, we cannot fail to mention the contributions of Achille Mbembe (2018) for the understanding of the specificities of this type of power in the global South. According to the thinker, the "extreme situations", which Foucault talks about, are current politics in the colonized periphery of capitalism. A necropolitics whose foundation is primarily the production of death, in a context whose production of docile and useful bodies for the functioning of capital is replaced by the very dispensability of these bodies. It is also a concept founded on the articulation between the notions of biopower, sovereignty and the state of exception, since it resumes the Agambenian debate about sovereignty and exceptionality about the production of life that is “worthless” and unworthy of being lived; as well as the argument that the exception - the suppression of the norm for its maintenance - has become a government paradigm (Agamben, 2004).

In this way, thinking about the discursive assemblies in moments of crisis, starting from the key of necropolitics, also seems interesting, although it is important to point out that such an exercise would

not be evident only in moments of “suspension”, but also in times of “normality”. It must be remembered that the Brazilian State has always divided the population between those who must live and those who can die, whose death was not always caused by letting them die, but by making them die (Leite, 2020).

Regarding the current crisis management, it is evident that the virus has hit the racialized and most vulnerable layers more strongly, which points to a differential management over bodies and space. About this, Butler deals with agencies that have produced precariousness in pandemic times, by paying attention to the falsely democratic dimension to which the virus submits us (Butler, 2020). In this sense, if the pandemic connects us and establishes a condition of vulnerability to which we are all exposed, there is an evident differential distribution of this condition, insofar as not all lives are subject to mourning. According to the philosopher, there are epistemological frameworks that act in the differentiation of lives, in the possibility of their apprehension as such or not, produced according to the myriad of inequalities to which we are subjected. In its terms, there are frameworks that produce “perishable populations, which can be sacrificed [...] and considered threats to human life as we know it, and not as living populations that need protection against illegitimate state violence, hunger and pandemics” (Butler, 2015, p. 53).

Furthermore, if space is produced from the assemblages of power, let us return to the argument by Loic Wacquant (2007) that cities are projections of inequalities. Through its landscape and its unequal distribution of bodies, the author points out that the management of the undesirable is a paradigm of government. Something that happens in the uneven distribution of political agencies that produce more qualified lives and in the production of policies that reinforce stigma and separation. Thus, for Wacquant, exclusion is an urban project that has been accentuated in the context of Western capitalism, with the intensification of a conflictive society. A project that seems to be constitutive of space, but which, as he postulates, has become more acute in recent decades, in a context of rising market rationality.

With these reflections in mind, when I pay attention to governance practices in times of suspension in Brazilian territory – more specifically, three major health crises - I seek to apprehend them based on the discursive key. If I start from the hypothesis that biopolitics is a policy of differential vulnerability and that, in times of crisis, difference management is exposed in greater evidence, I seek to investigate its exercise from official agencies - specifically the speeches undertaken by the imperial bureaucracy and by the health agencies of the republican nation-state. Something that seeks to be realized from the archaeological and genealogical inspiration.

Archeology is a historiographical procedure that aims to understand and discover the forms of rationality that organize the ways of doing and saying. It is centred on discursive materialities and seeks to question how history could give rise to definite types of discourse - what justified their appearance, what made them possible and what it means to have manifested themselves, leaving traces (Foucault, 2012).

It is also not a hermeneutical procedure, nor a causal one. It is not a question of interpreting them per se, of seeking their intrinsic meanings. It is about reflecting on the conditions of possibility. However, it is not a matter of understanding discursive practices from non-discursive domains (such as political events, economic practices, and processes etc.), but understanding them as part of the same domain.

In other words, it consists of showing not how a practice determines the meaning and form of a discourse, but how and why it is part of its conditions of emergence, insertion and functioning.

Thus, for archeology, the discourses are not documents, but monuments that can be excavated. They are not an inert material, whose its interpretation allows the “reconstitution” of a past and allows access to what subjects said or did. Instead, for archeology, discourses are processes that have a historicity and a unique condition of emergency, evoked, and produced from their *historical a priori*. Thus, making a discursive analysis based on archaeological parameters means relating the statements to the conditions of their historical appearance, as well as establishing the relationships of their coexistence, of their succession, of their mutual functioning, of their reciprocal determination and of their independent transformation or correlative (Foucault, 2012)

The archaeological approach, briefly described here, is interesting since the discourse is the privileged materiality on which this research focuses. However, I am especially interested in the effects of power, managed, and produced by the speeches, so that genealogy seems to us to be an appropriate complementary procedure. In this sense, in addition to reflecting on what makes possible the appearance of species of discourse, it is essential to reflect on how such discourses serve to support powers, understanding that discourse is, at the same time, effect and instrument of power. More specifically: it is about interrogating the discourses on two levels: (1) what are the reciprocal effects of knowledge and power and (2) what conjuncture and what correlation of forces makes its use necessary (Foucault, 2014).

The wide temporality is justified by the fact that the statement is rare. As Foucault argues, discursive events, even though they may be innumerable or exceed all the capacity for recording, memory or reading, constitute a finite set. We repeat them, reproduce them, transform them, collect them in totalities that unify them and multiply the meanings that inhabit them. Thus, for a new statement to appear, it is necessary that it is inscribed in a kinship domain with other objects, establishing relations of similarity, neighbourhood, distance, difference, and transformation with them. For this reason, that is, due to the need for this historical inscription, it is not possible to talk about anything at any time, nor to say something new with ease (Foucault, 2012).

In addition, given the archaeological and genealogical approaches, I am especially interested in the moments of temporary disruption the “suspensions”, since they reveal exacerbations of current processes and that sometimes culminate in more lasting disruptions. Something that refers to the concept of an event in Foucault regarding the novelties that establish new forms of regularity (Castro, 2016), i.e., fissures that make the present what it can no longer be.

In this sense, looking at the forms of government in times of health crisis from official discourse agencies consists of an exercise in diagnosing the present and denaturalizing the past (Foucault, 2010). From an expanded temporality, I seek to apprehend and characterize what made us possible, but, following the lines of today's vulnerability, I also seek to apprehend how what exists today could no longer be what it is. It is, therefore, an exercise of seeking to understand what we still are, what we are already ceasing to be and what we are becoming.

Yellow fever, Spanish flu and covid 19: A brief view

Having presented the guiding axes of this work, I now will briefly discuss the events in order to better explain their articulations, as well as the reason for framing them as “suspension” events. I also try to present some notes about what official management was and how it came about in discursive terms.

The outbreak of yellow fever occurred in the summer from 1849 to 1850. That was a moment before microbiology. Doctors, engineers and public authorities focused on the sanitary and housing conditions of the capital of the empire, Rio de Janeiro, and pointed out that the tenements and their residents were the main causes of these diseases (Chalhoub, 2018). Although epidemic outbreaks were relatively common, Brazil boasted the title of a nation free from both cholera and yellow fever. It was the first time that the disease hit the country, mainly decimating the European immigrant population that would replace slave labor (Maio, 2010). At this time, diseases such as tuberculosis - which had a greater incidence on the popular classes - were strongly neglected by imperial management, as Sidney Chalhoub argues. In turn, about yellow fever, jurist Rui Barbosa described it as follows:

> Conservative of the African element, exterminating the European element, the yellow, black and xenophobic plague attacked the existence of the nation in its marrow, in the regenerating sap of the good African blood with which the immigration current comes to purify the veins of the primitive miscegenation, and us gave, in the eyes of the civilized world, the air of a white slaughterhouse (as quoted in MAIO, 2010, p.53).

The statement shows how the civilization project was linked to the ideal of whitening. "Purifying the veins of primitive miscegenation" meant taking measures to facilitate and enable the massive entry of European immigrants into the country. Thus, one of the necessary measures would be to improve public health conditions, with an emphasis on combating diseases that threatened the white immigrant population. For Chalhoub, the relationship between hygienism and a racist civilization process was the key factor that culminated in the collective management of the outbreak and in an important centrality of medical and urban efforts in combating the pathogen. This is evident in the creation, in 1850, of the Central Board of Hygiene, an organ of the imperial bureaucracy whose purpose was to oversee public health issues. It also acted in partnership with the City Council of the Court, charged with discussing the regulation of housing collective agreements.

In an attempt to quell the disease, it was sought to attack it by transforming the topography of cities and the various components of urban life (Maio, 2010). The pathogen vector was not known to be a mosquito, but there was a strong belief in the association between lifestyles and disease. In a statement published by the Diário de Rio de Janeiro, the “visit” of the disease is signified as a result of the “miserable state” of sanitation on the streets of the capital.

In another communication, published in the same newspaper, guidelines from the Empire were made available to the population, among which: leaving the city and moving to “elevated and healthy” areas, being extra care in cleanliness and living in spacious places exposed to natural light. Collective housing was perceived as a source of the spread for epidemics, something that culminated in the current demolition and expropriation of tenement houses (Chalhoub, 2018, p. 196).

In this sense, it is important to point out the strong link between the notions of “dangerous class” and “poor class” in evidence at the time. The terminologies of the 19th century, imported from Europe in reference to deviant subjects, were widely reproduced by the imperial bureaucracy in their management of the crisis. The poor classes were perceived as dangerous not only because they could “offer problems for the reproduction of work and maintenance of public order”, but also because they were perceived as a danger of contagion (Chalhoub, 2018). We see, therefore, some indications that point to the relationship between official discourse and differential management.

In turn, in 1918, the world faced a pandemic scenario caused by the Spanish flu. A badly contagious disease, of rapid incubation and whose total deaths are estimated between 20 and 100 million people, affecting young people to elderly. According to Gina Kolata (2001), this was the disease that killed the most humans in a period of similar duration in history. In Brazil, the disease has increased the average mortality rate by almost 2,000%. According to Adriana Goulart (2005), around 15 thousand people died in Rio de Janeiro alone, with around 600 thousand cariocas being hospitalized, that is, 66% of the local population. In view of the speed of virulence, no combat strategy was previously put in place to help the population, and many of the deficiencies in sanitary and health structures were revealed during the period.

Carlos Seidl, then head of the Directorate-General for Public Health, first conceived the epidemic as a “common disease” and demanded usual measures to be taken, such as isolating patients, disinfecting ships and luggage and carrying out tests on passengers who were apparently sick. Despite the measures, places with large crowd sizes, such as schools, barracks and public offices, experienced high contagion, something that was perceived as “the natural course of the influenza epidemic” (Brito, 1997).

With the number of infected people, individual care was suggested, in addition to prophylactic measures in ports, as indicated by an official statement from the Directorate-General for Public Health published in the press in October 1918. Among the measures, the document recommended actions such as avoiding crowds, closed places and taking hygienic care with the nose and throat. For prevention, it was also recommended to use quinine - believed to be the cure to the disease and whose demand increased radically in the period, despite the strong side effects, such as fainting, deafness and vomiting, as reported by Pedro Nava (2001).

However, the number of deaths continued to expand and the proposal to isolate the city was not effectively discussed, despite opposition newspapers pointing to the need for social management of the crisis (Brito, 1997). However, even with the absence of decrees that indicate a need for isolation and quarantine, there are a number of reports that indicate an emptying of the streets due to the collective illness of the population. Schools closed, newsrooms had reduced staff, there was a shortage of doctors and gravediggers (Nava, 2001).

The insistence on the benignity of the disease associated with the rising number of deaths culminated in Seidl's dismissal and his replacement by doctor Teófilo Torres, who minimized the problems of medical care. At that moment, the Correio da Manhã noticed a series of governmental actions – given both to disclose what was done, as to instruct the population based on state parameters, such as the document entitled “An advice from the director of Public Health”.

However, the scarcity of funds for public health made it difficult to implement and maintain projects and limited public aid. In addition, the pathogen was especially violent in areas that had more poor sanitary condition, such as the suburbs and other peripheral areas, regions with greater lack of access to medical services.

Finally, in November 2019, the first case of Covid-19 in the world was confirmed, a disease resulting from contamination by the new coronavirus. With approximately 2.7 million dead already - of which, more than 300 thousand are in Brazilian territory - the disease rapidly spread in a context of global capitalism and in March 2020 it was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Brazil had its first confirmed case in February 2020 and, since then, maintains a high infection curve, being the country with the highest rate of daily deaths. Despite a certain consolidation of policies implemented in countries that previously faced the crisis and WHO recommendations, management at the national level seems to point to a denial about the status of the pandemic. Something that seems to be evident in the gatherings caused and encouraged by the presidency of the republic, in the resignation of two health ministers due to discrepancies with the criteria of social distancing and quarantine, in the insistence of medications whose effectiveness is not proven in scientific research of greater relevance and in the masking of data.

Another issue worth mentioning is that, if in other countries, the virus seemed to produce a sense of community, with a discursive construction of a “we”, in reference to the “fair” precarious status that everyone is submitted; on the other hand, in Brazil, such articulation does not appear so clearly, given the way the crisis has been managed and discursivized. The virus was not established as the antagonistic referent par excellence – alongside it were speeches that pointed to the inexistence of this cohesive Brazilian “us”. This is evidenced in attacks on state and municipal managers and medical authorities dedicated to fighting the disease, as well as in attacks on the press committed to publicizing the scenario.

In this sense, it seems to me that negationism and multiple antagonisms are configured as important characteristics of the speeches to be analyzed, and that they are articulated with a policy of non-action, which has produced deaths and fomented precariousness. Characteristics that point to resonances and approximations with forms of management of yore, such as the insistence on the benignity of the disease, the recommendation of “miraculous” medicines and the unequal distribution of the consequent political agencies, when they exist.

Final considerations

When investigating three major health crises from an archeogenealogical approach, I seek to identify the continuities and, above all, the discontinuities of changes in the dynamics of managing space and bodies in times of temporary disruption. I believe that the broad view allows us to identify and problematize the discursive changes that permeate the chosen events.

With this, the research points out that there are approximations of Covid-19's forms of management with forms of management of yesteryear, such as an exercise in a precarious biopolitics (Leite, 2020), i.e., a

management incident on life that produces precariousness; as well as an ideological use of the disease, revealed in the political crisis management; however, we also believe that there are processes that mark the uniqueness of our time, such as multiple antagonisms and a strong denial about the status of the crisis - discontinuities visible from the look at broad temporality.

In more precise terms, it seems evident that the production of vulnerability has been a constitutive element of the country's social formation, and strongly evidenced during crisis management. There are, therefore, resonances about a precarious management that, today, seem to point to an aggravation and expansion of such a scenario.

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Populism and the Radicalization of Democracy. The Frontiers of Democratization

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Abstract

The political, social, and cultural phenomenon of populism is often read in the context of, or in opposition to, democracy. In my paper, I analyze populism by putting it into the perspective of a radicalization and evolution of democratic ideals and institutions. These dynamics take place on several levels. Historically, classic Western democracies are based on ideas and institutions which have become established from the age of the earliest revolutions in the 18th century to the end of World War Two. In some cases, the accomplishment of substantial democracy is more recent, as there are European countries where women have been allowed to vote as late as 1971. Still, society has undergone thorough transformations from half a century ago. A possible reading of the contemporary explosion of populist movements therefore identifies it with the radicalization of the egalitarian and libertarian ideals of modernity, expressed in various, context-dependent, and oftentimes contradictory or oppositional forms, and with the challenge to institutions and practices based on 'classic'/outdated conceptions of democracy. A connected point is the evolution of democracy due to technological and technical transformations. In an age when citizens almost 'live' on the internet, the sacrality of 'casting the ballot' - and the practical reasons which dictated corresponding procedures – has become open to questions. This is all the more evident with the COVID-19 crisis, as suggested by the way remote voting and automated counting have offered occasions for an explosive right-wing populist contestation. Indeed, right-wing populism can possibly be read as a conservative reaction to such evolutions, and left-wing populism as a progressive one, but both are often open to important mutual contaminations.

Keywords: Populism, democracy, radicalization, democratization, political cleavages

"Constructing a people is the main task of radical politics."

Ernesto Laclau

In his book on The Future of Democracy, the leading Italian political theorist Norberto Bobbio identified a number of 'broken promises of democracy' (Bobbio, 1987; see Müller, 2014)

> […] namely the survival of invisible power, the persistence of oligarchies, the suppression of mediating bodies, the renewed vigour in the representation of particular interests, the

> break-down of participation, the failure to educate citizens (or to educate them properly) - some could not objectively be kept and were thus illusions from the outset, others were not so much promises as misplaced hopes, still others as it turned out came up against unforeseen obstacles. In none of these circumstances is it appropriate to speak of the 'degeneration' of democracy. It is better instead to speak in terms of the natural consequences of adapting abstract principles to reality, or of the inevitable contamination of theory when it is forced to submit to the demands of practice. This applies to all the broken promises but one […] (Bobbio, 1987, p.18).

It is worth noticing that the promise which was actually broken, according to Bobbio, was the one regarding the transparency of politics (referring to Canetti, 1960, chapter 4) and the existence of invisible powers. In those very years, as a matter of fact, the context Bobbio was referring to, Italy, was plagued by secret plots along the conflict lines of the Cold War. In later years even other kinds of secret organizations between far-left and far-right pro and counter revolutionary forced were exposed. Nonetheless, this example shows that the question of whether the promises of democracy are kept or not is evidently an empirical question, and possibly a highly contextual one. It could as well be reminded that the list provided by Bobbio is not exhaustive. In this article, I claim that populism consists in taking a stance over such democratic dilemmas: populism takes up the promises of democracy, exposes the – actual or alleged – incoherence of ordinary politics, and calls for radical compliance with such foundational principles. This compliance can take many forms and be interpreted variously: for example, ‘resistance against elites’ can target capitalists and conservative forces – such as media defending established interests – as well as attacking intellectuals and transnational powers. The direction attributed to the progression of democracy is what distinguishes the populism of the right from the populism of the left. Still, in their reconstitution of the people, as well as in their radicalizing agenda and in their methods of establishing hegemony, the two are similar or even mirror images.

It is important to stress that by this suggestion I am not trying to solve the ‘definitional’ debate about the nature of populism. In fact, I do not find it necessary to commit to an ‘essentialist’ view of the phenomenon (in line with Mouffe, 2018). Nor am I concerned, at this stage, with the multifarious empirical manifestation of international populism. What I am now considering is populism as seen from the perspective of political theory. My intervention has therefore to do with the second of the main interrogatives identified by Margaret Canovan (2004): ‘the relation between populism and democracy’. Nonetheless, the issue pertains to identifying populism also, as I am here suggesting that wherever we find an unresolved tension between democratic principles and practice, we are very likely to encounter populism also. Populism occupies the gaps between democratic ideology and political reality: it is an answer, in one way of the other, to undecided democratic dilemmas, and most relevantly to those which define the identity of the people and the nature of political power or sovereignty. In this article, I explore this insight in its historical and sociological dimension as well as by elaborating on the sides of the populism-of-the-left/populism-of-the-right divide, before drawing conclusions.

History: Populism in the Democratic Context

The intuition that I intend to explore here is that the first dilemma which is encountered in todays' democratic arena is that of the constitution of the people. The apex of democratic institutions and values coincided with a decline in legitimation due to the universalism of democratic principles. The solutions which have been found to such tension, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and supranational institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union, all raise questions on the direction democracy should take given the ambiguity between the persistence of the state as the fundamental political unit and the underlying universalist principles which, at least in the West, characterize the state's constitutions. Examples of general answers include a conservative appeal to localist and nationalist ideologies by the populism of the right, and an encouragement to proceed further with internationalization and globalization by the populism of the left. Still, there are overlapping and exchanges between the two even on this issue.

The Age of the Nation-State

Benedict Anderson's (1983) famous contribution has shown how modern-day nationalism is the result of the supplanting of religious and other ideological sources by the emerging hegemony of the nation-state. As a result, for an entire era, but especially in the 19th century, in the long process of state formation and state unification, Europeans could answer not only fundamental political questions such as Who Are We? (Huntington, 2004) but even existential questions such as 'who am I?' (Taylor, 1989) by appealing to the nationalist ideologies which were by the time nourished by romantic philosophy. The principle of sovereignty and the monopoly of power into the institutions of the state provided de facto as ultimate a response as one could desire to such interrogatives.

The Moving Frontiers of Globalization

However, this was to change, both in practice and the facto, with the collapse of nationalist ideologies on the wake of World War I and, more blatantly, of World War II (see Benhabib, 2000; Benhabib et. al. 2006, and Habermas, 1998). At this point, a new, supranational, universalist normative foundation emerged, with the concept of human rights, accompanied by corresponding practices and institutions. While these were born out of the democratic revival which followed the defeat of the most radically authoritarian regimes in the West, these institutions and their ideologies have a very different relationship with 'the nation' than the classic ones which emerged from modern revolutions and are still enshrined in the nation-state. As such, they are exposed to the risk of being seized by global superpowers in the pursuit of their interests (Zolo, 1997) and can even be seen as anti-democratic or illegitimate by citizens who perceive them as going against their choices and self-determination. Importantly, however, globalization has happened on an economic and sociological level as well. And here again, there has been progresses but also problems. Social groups are benefitting from it unequally, and populist parties tend to mobilize the dissatisfaction of the 'loser' (Kriesi, 2014). By working on both side of the newly-emerged 'transnational cleavage' (Kriesi, 2018, p. 16) populist parties on the right tend to claim national and local identity back, while left-populism pushes the process

of democratization and moral universalism forward. Yet this picture is not without complications. One could take, for example, the case of Scottish identity and nationalism: in reaction to Brexit, a large part of Scottish society, tracing its roots back to the Scottish Enlightenment, combines its Scottish identity with Europeanism. On the other hand, a party which could qualifiedly be called 'conservative', and which after having flirted with the left passingly in a distant past can now be safely considered right-wing, the Italian League, was born with the elaboration of a 'Northern', regionalist, and sometimes even secessionist identity.

These left-right shifting fractures, however, should not obscure the mere fact that the constituency of political identity has become a question mark in the West after the World-War crisis of Westphalian sovereignty, both ideologically and practically. The fact that right-wing populist can often solve the dilemma by investing the ideological heritage of communities and the nation-state, and benefit from the fact that this latter still represents the unit where power is concentrated in domestic and international politics, can perhaps partly explain why they tend to be more successful. In order to win, left-wing internationalist populism would need to establish discontinuity with the the local community and the nation state which at present seems of revolutionary character.

Social Transformations

Another point of fracture where one can situate the emergence of populist politics concerns the social transformations which have characterized societies worldwide, and which often have ideological and distinctively political implications. I will here sketch only some of them.

From the Landsgemeinde…

In times of a pandemic which has forced the world population to retreat to their places and homes and to switch most of their social and professional life – including conferences – to online, differences with the traditional modes of communal life are all too easily shown. It should not be forgotten, however, that life in the Anthropocene has always been marked by artificiality and by the transformation of the environment by human beings. This obviously affected the modes and contents of politics as well as everything else. In the history of humanity (see Diamond, 1997) the starting point has been the tribal group, and this still informs human biology and behavior. It is difficult to ascertain when exactly modes of politics resembling those which are still in use today emerged. Independently from whether this had happened before or after the revolution of domestication which substantially impacted the development of civilization, it is certain that its primitive modes looked very different from the possibilities of today. A case in point is the institute of Landsgemeinde, by which some Swiss canton still exercise direct democracy by convening in a square and voting with their raised hands. It is evident that politics undertaken at such level implies a number of dimensions which have been lost or superseded in the modern world. Knowing one's neighbor, their daily life, and being existentially and often indeterminately connected to the life of the community in a clearly-defined and secluded land, say a valley between the Swiss alps, confers and entirely different character to political deliberation than casting a vote once every four years in a large federal nation. No less different is the mode of engagement which was made

possible by the Greek city-states where the very word democracy was invented, even if classic Athens counted hundred of thousands inhabitants. Appreciating these historical changes in social life and technology would enable us of becoming aware of those which are presently affecting democratic life.

… to the World Wide Web

As the possibility of intervening in political matters and voting on them has been transformed by the appearance of, and quasi-universal access to, the internet, unprecedented questions started piling up, and again offered occasions for the emergence of populist politics. I would recall just a few examples.

Some populist parties such as the Five Start Movement, in Italy, identified themselves with their blog and online platform, tellingly called 'Rousseau', since their very origins. They argued that politics should be transformed now that the citizens have a possibility to be informed and express themselves at negligible costs. Reasons to question their case could come from other instances of the technologization of politics, such as the allegations of Russian interferences in the US elections of 2016. Indeed, online activities are potentially more vulnerable to manipulation, and harder to check, than voting in the traditional way. Leaving technology aside, dilemmas on the radicalization of politics have also emerged at the most recent US elections in November 2020. There, the question was how to consider – and regulate – voting which was cast through the mail due to the pandemic. Here again, right-wing populism appealed to traditional practices to try delegitimizing their adversaries. But the same contest had an online follow-up when the leader of this right-wing movement, former US President Donald Trump, was silenced on Facebook. The fact is that the standard regulations and modes of free speech which have been codified since the emergence of traditional-style democracies in the 19th century were simply thought for another era. Then, the printed word – still relatively costly – had a degree of solemnity which preserved freedom of whispering and gossiping without consequences. Now, this whispering and gossiping has to take place in written or in recorder messages, on social media. These can obviously circulate and give rise to accusations of defamation or hate speech. Again, it is difficult and highly-contextual to situate right and left-wing populists around this divide. The same right-wing populists can protest again the powers of 'big-tech' on their favorite channels or on other social media. The point is that social-technological change – and the internet is but an example- is generating dilemmas to which democratic principles do not have any ready-made answers until they are radicalized, in a way or another, in their populist versions.

The Pandora Box of Postmodernity

In this last section, I elaborate more generally on the relationship between populism and the contemporary age seen in its postmodern character. Postmodernism has become a catchphrase of sorts and it needs being specified before being applied. Even if I am convinced by its general and broader meaning, in the sense of there being a qualitative, cultural leap from the condition of modernity, the more specific meanings I am relying on here are two. As it will appear, they are different but mutually connected. The first one is Jean-François Lyotard's (1979) definition of the characterizing trait of

postmodernity as ‘incredulity towards meta-narratives’. In postmodernity, background, far-reaching and far-embracing ideologies such as religion, nationalism, the ideals of the Enlightenment, or ‘political religion’ of the kind of Communism and Fascism as collapsed together with the worldviews John Rawls called ‘comprehensive doctrines’ and which are confined to the private sphere.

Lyotard’s definition can aptly be compared with the one provided by Zygmunt Bauman (e.g., 1997). The Polish-British sociologist famously described postmodernity as a ‘liquid’ condition where social roles and identities are transient. As it seems, postmodernity is continuous with modernity in as much as it erodes the stability of pre-modern, traditional societies, founded over collectivist values and ascribed identities. Many of the destabilizing tensions of the postmodern condition are unresolved and they reflect on politics, as exemplified by Bauman’s binomial between ‘happiness’ and ‘security’ as individual and political values, which emerges overwhelmingly in the context of the securitization brought about by the ‘war on terror’ or even by the pandemic, and impact on all kinds of politics, including, and most evidently, populism of the left and the right.

Community or Oppression?

The first unresolved dilemma of the postmodern condition might be the trade-off between the safety afforded by collective identity – as is well exemplified by the case of the constitution in a nation or ‘people’, to which referred earlier. Right-wing ideologies and movements, including those of a populist kind, tend to look back to communal and traditional values to shield their members from the waves of uncertainties brought about by individualistic and universalistic globalization. Cases in points are the countries of the Visegrad groups, and especially Hungary and Poland, where religious, ethnic, and historical imaginaries have powerfully reemerged in response to what has been described as ‘the threat’ of immigration, Europeanization, foreign languages and cultures, diversity in society, economic diversification and transformation etc.

On the other hand, left-wing movements, especially the populist ones, pursue an agenda of enfranchisement from the oppression of such actors, identities, and groups. This is often characterized as a coalition of those affected by various forms of oppression: migrants, gender minorities, and the like. Here again, as it happened with the relationship with the nation-state, it can be noted that the right has a strategic advantage, as they are able to present their ideology not only in a classical and already established mode, oftentimes derived from the past, as I have already argued, but also because their ideologies are, in many instances, collectivist and communitarian in character. Therefore, they tend to wedge the anarchist and centrifugal charge against the left, which instead tends to vindicate its pluralistic and diverse character.

Liberation or Solitude?

In this moment of social isolation, it should not be forgotten that freedom comes at a high psychologically and socially. It requires an optimistic worldview and a solid provision of self-esteem to be embraced and carried forward. Thinkers of the Frankfurt school have already emphasized the risks of embracing authoritarianism out of fears of insecurity in the age of totalitarianism (Fromm, 1941). Yet many forms

of emancipation of the individual from constraints – family bond, for instance – also take a price in terms of the sociability which is accordingly lost. In his documentary on The Swedish Theory of Love, Erik Gandini (2015) explores this dilemma in the Nordic societies of advanced modernity. The documentary ends by no accident with an interview with Bauman over the subject of independence and solitude. By touching upon issues of liberation and identity, even if rhetorically, populists also return to unsolved issues in contemporary political anthropology.

Conclusion: A Running Thread or A Tight-Knit Knot?

In this essay, I have given examples of a number of issues relevant to the theory of contemporary populism. They were instances of a central and unique claim: that populism pursues radicalization of democratic principles in contexts of dilemmas or 'grey areas' or again 'crossroads of democracy.

I have started by introducing the concept of the 'broken promises' of democracy: those principles which are unrealized because they have been betrayed; because they are never fully realizable, but simply orientational horizons to guide democratic progress; or again because they are only allegedly forsaken and are being instrumentalized for political gains.

I have gathered such promises and principles around three thematic areas. The first one is the constitution of the political 'people': where does sovereignty and legitimacy reside? Right-wing populist claim power back to the national or local context, oftentimes by appealing to ideologies of the past. Still, they can count on ever powerful institutions, as the nation-state remains the cornerstone of politics even in the age of globalization. Left-wing populists, to the opposite, tend to legitimize European and global institutions, as well as multilateralism, as safeguards against nationalism and xenophobia. But both revolve around the fact that the traditional assertion of nationalist identity is no longer available.

The second set of questions regards the way to approach technological and social transformations. From the internet to the erosion of traditional hierarchies in social culture, populist on the left and the right take opposing sides on newly discovered possibilities to innovate democratic participation. Some claim that 'radical' democracy requires discarding them in favor of classic and established modes of political deliberation, the other believe that democratic principles compel to resort to them to universalize democratic participation.

Finally, I have touched upon some of the deepest cultural and anthropological questions which regard the condition of postmodernity. Since the crisis of family, religious, and other cultural values started at the end of the 1960s, culture wars reflect the way parties on the left and the right see political anthropology. While right-wing populists tend to be collectivist and conservative, left-wing ones strive for the protection and promotion of diversity as well as for the equality and liberty of individuals. Nonetheless, and as I repeatedly recalled, populism is highly contextual and left and right unusually 'exchange sides' on a variety of issues and for a number of reasons.

In conclusion, whether these issues are manifestation of the same running thread of political dynamics, or they are simply a tight-knit knot of otherwise disparate problems, these are some of the focal points

where populist politics is manifesting itself, and will continue doing it in the near future. In this essay, I have not taken any normative position over populism, neither in general nor in its left or right manifestations. My analysis seems however to suggest that it can be, as it has been claimed, both 'a threat and corrective for democracy' (Kaltwasser, 2012) and that the aspect which distinguishes it from ordinary (non-populist) political movements and parties is primarily its radical character (Nielsen, 2006).

Still, the article is meant to be useful in advancing the understanding of populism and in spotting the loci – some of which often overlooked – where it is likely to manifest itself, as well as of explaining the relative success of one of its variations. At the same time, I hope to have unearthed some of the deeper historical, social, ideological and anthropological roots of populism and of its left/right divide. Whoever has an interested in understanding, assessing, or even responding to the populist 'moment' should look attentively at these nubs: and put forward answers which are either alternatives to democratic principles and ideals or realize them in some form.

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Polarizing media populism during government crises in Finland and in Italy

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Abstract

In 2019, government crises occurred in Finland and in Italy: two European countries in which populist parties have recently become “mainstream”, entering national governments. Using critical discourse analysis, this work studies the communication of Finnish Finns Party (FP), Italian Lega and Five Stars Movement (FSM) and their leaders during the governmental crisis in their Twitter and Facebook channels, as well as their representations in “elite” newspapers (La Repubblica and Helsingin Sanomat) and in commercial/populist media outlets (Ilta-Sanomat and Il Fatto Quotidiano).

Despite the different political context, populists used similar communicational strategies, constructing a narrative of lies and truth, accusing other parties of having betrayed the citizens and representing themselves as the only pure and honest actors. The narrative of lies was linked to a typical far-right theme, immigration: In Finland left-wing parties were represented as willing to let dangerous terrorists enter the country, while in Italy the Lega depicted the FSM and the centre-left PD as eager to open the ports in the Mediterranean. In both cases, left-wing parties were represented as “radical chic”, disconnected from the needs of common citizens.

I show that in both countries this divisive rhetoric was strengthened by mainstream media, in contrast to previous expectations that elite media would be critical of populists. Populist right-wing leaders were represented as a threat to democracy, but also as clever political masterminds, almost with an admiring tone. This reveals that, in the hybrid media environment, populist actors’ messages can be amplified by both elite and commercial media, exacerbating the polarization in society and making the countries less united.

Keywords: populism, populist communication, Lega, Five Star Movement, Finns Party

Introduction

Both in Finland and Italy, populist parties that used to have a more radical profile have entered political institutions and governments. The parties followed different trajectories: while the Italian Lega was born in 1991 and the Finnish Finns Party in 1995, the Italian Five Star Movement (FSM) is a more recent phenomenon, born in 2009 on the basis of grassroots activism. They have also changed during time, and they represent different types of populism.

Lega changed from a regionalist into a nationalist party, changing its demands for autonomy of Northern Italy with attacks on EU and immigration (Albertazzi et al. 2018). This strategy led Lega to a historical success in the 2018 election, after which it formed a government with the FSM. FSM has been called an 'eclectic' or 'polyvalent' populist party, mixing traditional right-wing and left-wing elements (Mosca and Tronconi, 2019; Pirro, 2018). It has been shown that, after five years in parliament, the FSM violated its core principles on representation, media, justice, leadership, and alliances (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2019). The Movement that started from an anti-establishment basis, has formed governments with right-wing Lega in 2018, with center-left PD in 2019, and with a large coalition supporting the partly technocratic Monti cabinet in 2021.

The Finns Party derives from the 'agrarian populist' (Taggart 2000) Finnish Rural Party (SMP). The Finns Party was officially established in 1995, and under the leadership of Timo Soini represented conservative, yet more leftist socioeconomic stances, compared to other Nordic populist parties (Niemi 2013). The party participated in a government with the center-right Coalition Party and with the conservative, centrist Centre Party from 2015 to 2017, before splitting in two (with the FP leaving and the splinter Blue Reform group remaining in the government). Under the new leader Jussi Halla-aho, FP has evolved towards stricter right-wing and anti-immigration positions and has remained in opposition since 2017. This reveals an evolution towards mainstreaming and moderating populism during Soini's leadership, and a shift towards radicalization during the opposition period and leadership of Halla-aho.

Despite the differences between histories, ideologies and types of populism of these parties, it is interesting to note that in both countries populists have succeeded in becoming mainstream, gathering sufficient popular support to enter first national parliaments and then governments. This is the first level of maistreaming populism, as defined by Herkman et al. (forthcoming). In 2019, government crises occurred both in Finland and in Italy. In Italy, the Lega/FSM government broke up, and was replaced by a new one, supported by FSM and PD. In Finland, the coalition parties did not change, but there was a government reshuffle. The focus of this study is social media communication of populist parties during the crises and their representation in elite and tabloid newspapers. I will analyse whether also a second dimension of mainstreaming populism, that of media adapting populist logic (Herkman et al, forthcoming), occurred during the government crises, studying the interplay between populists' own social media communication and traditional press, as in today's hybrid media system contents circulate between the press, politicians, and citizens (Chadwick, 2013).

Understanding of populism

In this work, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's theory on inclusive and exclusive populism (2013) will be used to categorize the social media content by parties. The 'exclusive' and 'inclusive' types are distinguished by how populists define who belongs to 'the people', and the ideological features attached to the populist ideology (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 148). The categorization has three dimensions: material, political, and symbolic. In material exclusion, specific groups are excluded from access to the state resources, whereas in material inclusion some groups are specifically targeted to

receive (more) resources (ibid, p. 158). In political exclusion, particular groups are prevented from participating in the democratic system, whereas political inclusion aims to increase the participation and representation of certain groups (ibid., 161). The symbolic dimension alludes to defining 'the people' against 'the elite'. When populists do not refer to certain groups in their rhetoric, they are symbolically excluded. Accordingly, when particular groups are linked to 'the elite', they are implicitly excluded from 'the people'. In contrast, when groups are explicitly included in the definition of 'the people', they are symbolically included (ibid., p. 164).

Media populism

While politicians can be populist in their discourses, so can the media. Populism by media has been understood as a distinct style adopted by the media (Krämer 2014) and it has been noted that media can enhance populists' success if 1) the party receives a great deal of (positive) coverage; 2) the issues of the party are overexposed; and 3) the general framing of news favors the party (Walgrave and de Swert 2004). However, populists can benefit from growing media coverage, even when it is negative (Esser et al. 2017). Moreover, media scandals may benefit populists by allowing them to play the victimized "underdog" position (Wodak 2015, Herkman 2018).

Different media systems influence how populists are treated in the media. Italy belongs to the Mediterranean Polarized-Pluralist model (Hallin and Mancini 2004), where political connections between media and politics strongly influence the coverage of political actors. Finland, instead, is part of the Democratic Corporatist Model, where commercial media logic prevails (ibid.). According to the life-cycle theory on populists' and media's relations, elite media and commercial tabloids tend to treat populists differently during their development phases (Mazzoleni 2008). However, tabloids are absent from the Italian media landscape (Papathanassopoulos 2008), hence for this study we had to replace a pure tabloid with a different newspaper.

Populists in power

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in populists in government (Albertazzi and Mueller 2013; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015). Regarding populism by politicians, it has been noted that non-right-wing parties use more moderate rhetoric than right-wing ones when they are in power (Ceron, 2020; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005). It has also been pointed out that, even though the life-cycle theory predicts the media to become disenchanted with populists once they achieve public legitimization (Mazzoleni 2008), occupying institutional roles can actually help populist parties to obtain media visibility (Mosca and Vaccari, 2017). Thus, it is interesting to see what kind of stances media takes on populists in two countries with different political history and media systems, but where populists have experienced the same kind of legitimation in the public sphere.

Material and methods

We analyzed public posts published in the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the populist parties and their incumbent leaders during the 30 days preceding the formation of a new government: in Finland 25.11.-25.12. 2019, when the government of Antti Rinne (SDP) broke up and the new government led by Sanna Marin (SDP) was formed, and in Italy 7.8.-7.9.2019, when the FSM/Lega government collapsed and the new one, supported by FSM and PD, was formed.

The unit of social media analysis was a single post. The posts were analysed using a codebook focused on the typical themes of inclusive and exclusive populism, defined by the theory of Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013): material, political, and symbolical populism. Each of these categories contained two dimensions. The exclusive political dimension contained posts expressing anti-establishment attitudes, targeted against the old political elite, mainstream media, and the economic elite. The inclusive political dimension included posts with participative attitudes, referring to incentives to change Italy and participate either by voting, or by taking part in party rallies and events. The exclusive symbolical dimension covered posts that referred to nationalism when speaking about Italy and Italians, while excluding other groups. The inclusive symbolical dimension referred to building ”our group”, which included party members or supporter citizens. The material dimension was divided between posts revealing pro-welfare-state attitudes and favoring a strong public sector, and those supporting the private economic sector.

The analysis also revealed the appearance of a new discourse category, that could not be ignored: institutional discourses. It contained references to institutional responsibilities, supporting the current government or leaders, references to institutional places, persons, communication (press conferences), and references to the people in the role of passive audience rather than active citizens.

These divisions lead to the subsequent elaboration of the scheme of Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), used in the analysis of posts:

Empirical adaptation of the dimensions of inclusive and exclusive populism

Dimension of populism	**Inclusive populism**	**Exclusive populism**
Material	Discourses on welfare state policies	Discourses on private economy
Political	Discourses on participation	Anti-establishment attitudes
Symbolic	Constructing our group, those included in ”People”	Excluding some group from the People
Institutional discourse	References to institutional responsibilities, places, actors, people in the role of audience	

Table 1 *Own elaboration from Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013.*

The dimensions mentioned here were not exhaustive of the content of all posts, and those that did not fit into these categories were excluded from the analysis (and are marked as ’other’ in the analysis section). Each post was assigned at most to one value category according to the most prevailing

discourse in it, and we counted how many posts fitted in the above-mentioned categories during the analysis periods. It was also crucial to study how different discourses evolved during the years. To this purpose, we used qualitative critical discourse analysis, combining the work of Fairclough (1989) and the discourse-historical approach (DHA) by Wodak (2001, 2015).

The newspapers' material consisted of articles mentioning populist parties and/or their leaders during the same analysis periods, collected from the archives of La Repubblica and Helsingin Sanomat (quality/elite newspapers) and Il Fatto Quotidiano and Ilta-Sanomat (popular papers). These articles were also studied using critical discourse analysis.

Analysis

1. Communication by populist parties

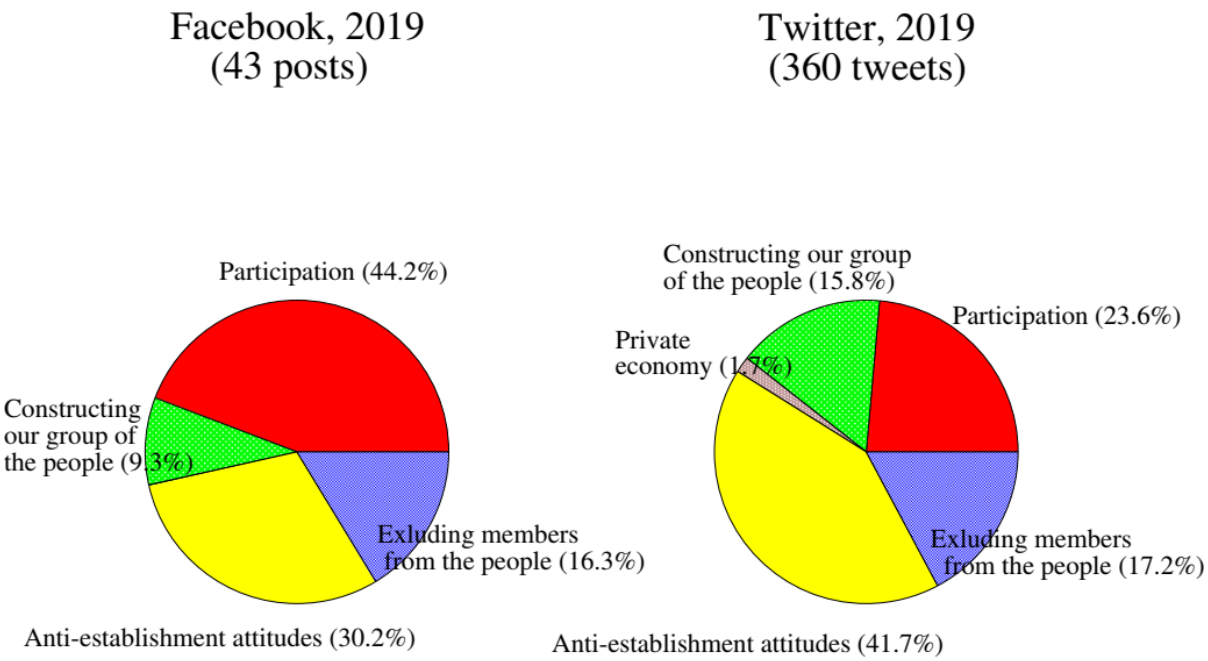
Social media communication by Lega

The analysis of social media accounts of Lega (see pie chart 1) revealed that the prevailing discourse categories in their posts were exclusion, attacking political adversaries and encouraging supporters' participation. The discussion on economy was absent.

Qualitatively, they preferred a direct and informal style when talking to citizens and used emotional expressions. The use of popular imagery, based on photos and posts about Italian food, landscapes, traditions, and family, was common. On the other hand, when dealing with attacks from adversaries, they played the role of victims (a strategy commonly used by right-wing populist actors, see Wodak 2015 and Herkman 2018) and often accused other politicians of hypocrisy.

The participation category mainly included encouraging people to participate in their *Estate Italiana* beach tour and to follow it via social media. In exclusive discourses, immigrants were presented as a threat, and described with metaphors of a tidal wave or invasion. Immigration was connected to the national security theme, portraying as dangerous conquerors of the country.

Attacks on political adversaries were directed against liberal and left-wing political elites, the FSM and the PD, who were represented as friends of immigrants and hence a threat to national security themselves, and against the foreign EU elite, that was suspected to be secretly setting the political agenda of the country.



Pie chart 1 Social media communication by Lega

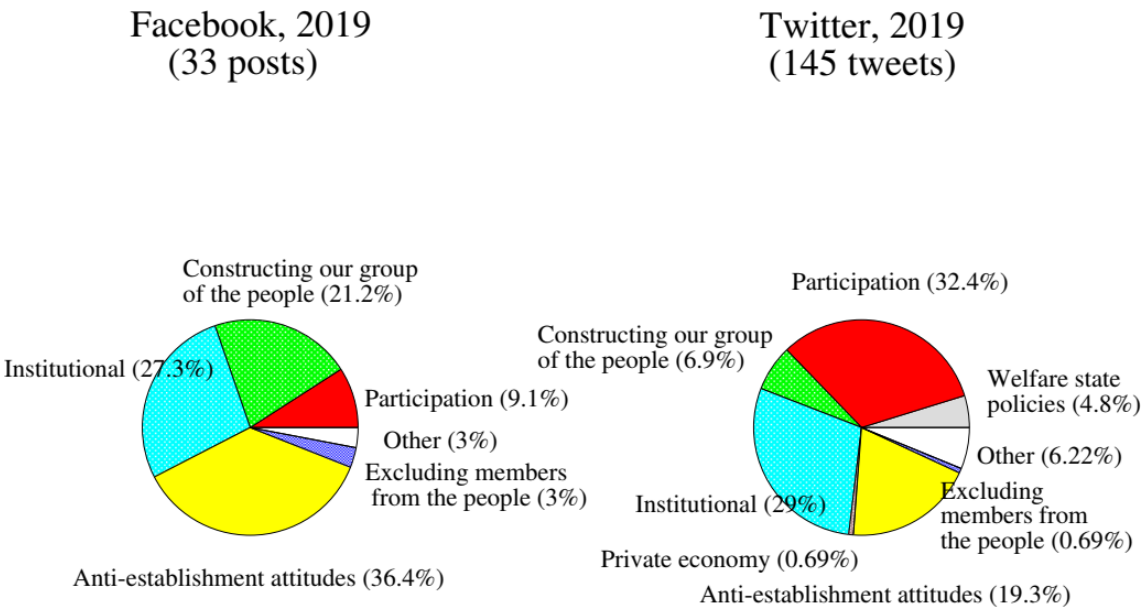
Social media communication by Five Star Movement

In the FSM communication, a new category emerges: institutionalization. This category includes references to FSM leaders with an institutional status, to institutional places (Senate, Parliament, Palace of the President of the Republic), and encouraging people to follow the Movement's official press conferences rather than participating directly. Argumentation was also often based on formal laws and orders. The institutionalization category can be regarded as more anti-populist than populist, as it entails speaking to people "from above", without involving them directly in the activities of the party.

Other relevant categories were attacking political adversaries, encouraging supporters to participate online and offline, and constructing a sense of belonging to 'our' group. Some talk about welfare issues was present on Twitter, but not on Facebook. Attacking political adversaries meant accusing Lega of having betrayed both the government alliance and Italians, by triggering the government crisis. Salvini was also personally attacked for his lazy and luxurious lifestyle, as he published selfies from the beach, holding a cocktail, while a government crisis was ongoing. The FSM itself was depicted as a responsible actor.

The participation category included posts encouraging inviting supporters to a beach party celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Movement. They tried to maintain their original radical rhetoric by saying that joining the party would mean "participating in the change" and linked their original theme of environment to the participation by encouraging environmentally friendly behaviour (for example, using recyclable cutlery in the beach party, and collecting plastic from the beach).

With this mix of grassroots participation and institutional roles, the FSM used contradictory words to describe their supporters: words like 'activists' and 'citizens' recalled participation from below, while the 'elected ones' referred to formal politics.



Pie chart 2 Social media communication by the FSM

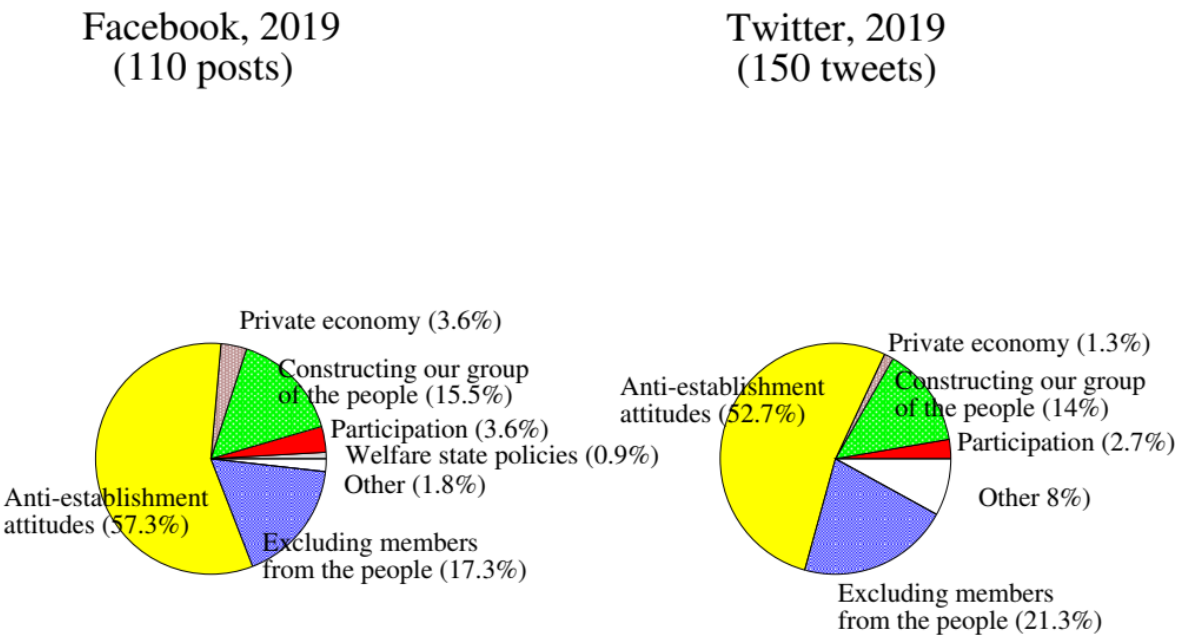
Social media communication by Finns Party

The Finns' Party's communication had many features in common with Lega: exclusion, attacking political adversaries, avoiding speaking about economy. Similar stylistic features included using irony, accusing other politicians of hypocrisy, and playing the role of a victim. The difference between the FP and Lega was that in FP's discourses there was less encouragement to participation.

In the Finnish government crisis two important themes were mixed: the 'Postigate' scandal that ignited the government crisis, and the discussion about the Al-Hol refugee camp. Regarding the former, the FP attacked the center-left SDP and the incumbent Prime Minister Rinne, accusing him of being against the interests of common workers. The Al-Hol case was used as a weapon against the liberal Greens and foreign minister Haavisto, who were accused of wanting to bring 'dangerous terrorists' into the country – immigrants formed also the category of exclusion. Thus, liberal and left-wing politicians were represented as a threat to security, and being against the interests of 'ordinary Finns'. They were also accused of constant lying, as the deportation from Al-Hol had been 'planned in secret', FP claimed.

2. Communication by media

To study the coverage of populist parties in media, two quality newspapers and two more popular papers were analyzed from each country: Helsingin Sanomat and Ilta-Sanomat from Finland, and La Repubblica and Il Fatto Quotidiano from Italy. Quality papers and tabloids were chosen to study whether they expressed different stances about populists, as expected by the media life-cycle model (Mazzoleni 2008). Il Fatto Quotidiano was chosen as 'substitute' of tabloid journalism, as it is a newspaper whose political values have been linked to the FSM, and its style has been called 'populist'.



Pie chart 3 Social media communication by FP

Coverage by La Repubblica

La Repubblica is a known supporter of Italian center-left Democratic Party (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Surprisingly, they gave much visibility to Lega (2398 articles including either the name of the party or its leader), and wondered many times about the reasons of Lega's success. It has been demonstrated that abundant coverage can enhance populists' success (Walgrave and de Swert 2004) – thus, La Repubblica itself could have helped Lega by offering it high visibility. Regarding contents, the paper wrote about the same themes that were present in Lega's own communication (Summer tour, demands for 'law and order'), often repeating the emotional expressions that Lega used in its social media accounts. The leader, Salvini, was often represented as a powerful and popular leader – calling him, for example, the only super-hero left.

La Repubblica framed a clear confrontation between Lega and the FSM: their competition was called a 'duel', where the FSM was 'dazed' or 'lost'. Di Maio was described as a weak leader, and internal party disagreements were interpreted as signs of weakness. The newspaper claimed that the FSM had failed to evolve from a protest movement to an actual institutional party. However, at the same time they were also accused of having lost their principles, and called hypocrites for governing with the PD, a party they had previously strongly opposed, as an element of the establishment. La Repubblica suspected that the only goal of the FSM was to remain in power at any cost – while it also lacked originality and initiative, and only reacted passively to what Lega did.

Coverage by Il Fatto Quotidiano

Il Fatto Quotidiano offered a positive coverage on Lega and its leader at the beginning of the analysis period: Lega was described as a powerful "decision-maker" in the government crisis. Lega's central theme on immigration was well covered, and the paper directly repeated some of Lega's Twitter content.

However, negative representations started when FSM opened negotiations with PD: Salvini was now accused of lying and bluff, when, seeing the new collaboration being formed, he tried to take back his call for a new election. Lega was depicted as having ended up in an impasse they created by themselves, and Salvini's representations changed from a popular showman to a ridiculous, drunk leader on the beach.

Correspondingly, at the beginning of the crisis the FSM was represented as weak and in a state of fear. It was claimed that voters had abandoned the FSM, and that it had lost its principles. The newspaper even predicted the disappearance of FSM from the political arena, due to weak leadership, internal divisions, and lost support. However, when the coalition with PD was being formed, FSM was described as more powerful – they could now choose with whom to form the government, and FSM gave a 'death kiss' to Lega. Grillo, they wrote, was euphoric about the collaboration with PD, as it allowed the Movement to return to its left-libertarian origins. Their program was called a "green program", including "the historical demands". In the end, the FSM was framed positively, doing well in the polls and being popular among members.

Coverage by Helsingin Sanomat

Helsingin Sanomat repeated news about the growing success of FP, representing it as popular, and wondered reasons for their success – similarly like La Repubblica did in case of Lega. The paper built a confrontation between the FP and liberal Green party, describing them as "two sorts of super politics", that represented different lifestyles or identities: while the Greens offered "the identity of a vegetarian cosmopolitan", FP appealed to a "white hetero man". The paper adopted FP's victimized style, when quoting FP's leader Halla-aho, who said that "all other parties have concentrated on appealing to a stereotypical, young, educated woman living in a city center", but that they "easily forget that even though a white hetero man would be evil, he still has right to vote". HS also repeated contents that were present in the FP's own communication: the FP as a party of immigration and the Greens as one of environment. They also reproduced FP's rhetoric on other parties as liars – for example, they claimed that Rinne should resign as he had lied to people in the Posti gate. The paper also repeated FP's rhetoric on how one should use "common sense" and "sense of proportion" in climate issues – thus, the FP appeared as reasonable and serious when pondering whether it was necessary to take actions against a scientifically proven fact, climate change.

Coverage by Ilta-Sanomat

Ilta-Sanomat often put the FP in the spotlight: they were dedicated a whole page, separate columns next to a bigger article, or their views were presented before other parties' opinions. Halla-aho's words were often quoted in titles. Halla-aho's tweets were also used as news material, without always telling the source – social media material was treated as interviews, even though copying a post does not include the same critical dimension of journalistic practices as an interview. They reported the growing success of FP, and described FP as powerful, or as a threat to other parties, using the metaphor of an 'attacking shark'. An admiring tone was used when writing about FP's efficient communication - 'The FP

decides what people talk about'. Halla-aho was depicted as a reliable source of information in the Al-Hol case, as if he would have more information about the deportations than official state sources. FP was also represented as a moral authority, in contrast to other 'lying' parties. A confrontation between the FP and the Greens was built, and in the Posti gate FP was represented as a defender of working class. However, some critique was expressed against their immigration policies, and the paper assumed that FP cannot maintain its popularity by always speaking about the same anti-immigration themes.

Conclusions

It was found that the communication of Lega and the FP showed similar features: their populism was mainly of the exclusive type, and they attacked left-wing and green adversaries and immigrants, while the discussion on economy was absent. However, the difference between them was that the FP did not encourage participation among its members like Lega did – this suggests that their communication and organization of the party is more leader-centred. The stylistic difference was that while Lega used more informal style and popular content to appeal to its voters, FP built a more serious and rational image of itself. However, they used some similar rhetorical devices: irony, hypocrisy, victimization.

In the discourses of FSM, a new category of institutionalization emerged, suggesting that they might be turning away from their populist identity, which normally entails the emphasis on people and participation – now the party put official politicians and political practices and places to the limelight. Otherwise, attacking political adversaries (Lega) was the most relevant discourse category. It is notable how they evolved from an anti-establishment Movement to one that was defending the status quo, their own power position. However, in the sphere of participation, they tried to maintain some of their original principles. The way how they described their own group reflected the confused identity of the institutionalized movement party – on one hand, they spoke about elected ones, and on the other, about activists.

In both countries, populist parties received a lot of visibility both in quality and in popular papers, which could have a positive effect on their general popularity, as theorized by Esser (2017). Populists were framed generally as powerful winners, although they remained in opposition in both countries. Both in Finland and in Italy, the press constructed a strong confrontation between right-wing parties – Lega and FP – and liberal and center-left parties – FSM and PD in Italy, Greens and SDP in Finland, and repeated themes used by right-wing parties, contrasting immigration to environment. This practice reproduced the polarization present in the communication of populist parties themselves. Newspapers also adopted stylistic elements used by populist parties in their own communication: Lega communicated with an emotional style, and La Repubblica described its relation to FSM with metaphors of love and death. FP instead build an objective, rational image of itself, and this was reflected to how FP was described in news in Finland both in quality and tabloid papers. Right-wing populists were many times represented as 'lonely warriors', opposed to all other parties, and this could suggest, as noted by Ceron (2020), that right-wing parties successfully maintain a more radical rhetoric when they institutionalize, while the more leftist populist party, FSM, had adapted and moderated its communication more as it had become a party of government.

Different media systems explain the coverage of papers. Italy belongs to the Mediterranean Polarized-Pluralist media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004), where political parallelism is high and the newspapers have a long history of being politically aligned (La Repubblica with PD and Il Fatto Quotidiano with FSM). La Repubblica framed the FSM negatively because of its political interests: FSM is an important rival of PD. Il Fatto Quotidiano started representing the FSM more positively when it showed hints of returning to some of its original demands, when the new coalition with center-left PD was being formed. In Finland, one would expect for a more neutral coverage, given the country's position as an example of Democratic/Corporatist model. However, the FP was treated rather uncritically both in the elite and tabloid media – in the end the tabloid resulted, surprisingly, slightly more critical. This evokes the question on whether the goal of neutral and equal journalism has led to avoiding any criticism towards populists, since the FP has many times accused the media in general of being in favor of leftist and green values.

It is also interesting that in both countries there was the journalistic practice of repeating and circulating populists' social media content. When directly using the social media content as source, the traditional critical aspect of journalism as a watchdog is forgotten. Regarding the life-cycle model and its expectations (Mazzoleni 2008), it results that media has not become 'disenchanted with populists' when they institutionalize, and that elite media was not particularly critical towards populists in either country, if we do not count La Repubblica's attacks on FSM, which can be explained, however, with the paper's political stances.

Finally, given the centrality and space that populist actors received in government crises, we could say that two levels of mainstreaming populism (Herkman et al., forthcoming) occurred: First, mainstreaming of populist actors as political parties themselves, as they had entered institutionalized politics, and were regarded as possible partners in governments followig goverment crises. Second, we can note the legitimization of populist rhetoric in media, as media framed populists prevalently positively, and repeated their communication style and content. In the future it would be interesting to study whether and how the process of mainstreaming of populist parties has taken place among citizens – whether populist logic has become such a pervasive force that it permeates all levels of society.

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Populism and Conspiracy Theories

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Abstract

This article systematizes the literature on populism and conspiracy theories and lays the groundwork for a theoretical framework based on the emotional side of cognitive processes for understanding the mobilizational capacity of conspiratorial rhetoric by populist candidates. In it, the author argues that conspiratorial narratives can be used instrumentally by populist leaders as a means to mobilize their base of supporters. This can be achieved through two specific mechanisms: (1) the populist can demonize and delegitimize opponents, making it the imperative of voters to defeat them; (2) the populist can rally supporters by position themselves as a "defender of the people" who will restore order and "decency" to the country from the conspiring forces.

Keywords: populism, conspiracy theories, January 6th, protest mobilization, emotions

Introduction

As with research on the new populist parties, the literature surrounding misinformation, conspiracy theories, and "fake news" has gathered momentum over the past decade to account for the seemingly large proliferation of alternative narratives in today's liberal democracies. The role of conspiracism in populist movements is a topic that is often mentioned in passing in the populist literature, yet hardly researched. Judging by the omission of the topic from the Cambridge Handbook of Populism (Kaltwasser, et al., 2017), for example, the link between the two has largely been ignored. Yet, when we observe the actions of populist movements today, the image of conspiring elites motivates much of the behavior of populist movements around the world.

This study intends to develop a formal theory for understanding the prominence of conspiratorial ideation among populist movements as well as the functions they serve in populist movements, by pulling from the literature on the role of affect in political behavior, the various conceptualizations of populism, and the sociological and psychological literature on conspiracism. In brief, I argue that the existence of conspiracism in populist movements cannot be fully understood without taking into account the role of emotions, intuition, common sense, which serve as the basis for the support for the leader. As the point of departure, I point to two mechanisms common to populist movements that serve to "attract" conspiratorial ways of thinking: (1) The cohesion of the populist worldview and those of conspiracy theories, which both imply a group of "elites" or "enemies of the people" that are destroying the people's way of life; (2) The emotional side of the leader-follower dynamic in populist movements which

corresponds to conspiracist cognitive patterns. In terms of their function, conspiracy theories serve certain mobilizational purposes that benefit the populist movement; (1) by "Othering" political opponents, and attributing blame to an "evil", or "conspiring" cohort of elitists, supporters of the populist feel a sense of urgency in the struggle between the two opposing forces that must be defeated in order to save the "heartland"; (2) by positioning oneself as being opposed to the plotting "enemies of the people", the populist leader demonstrates a kind of populist authenticity that 'proves' their support for the 'good people' in the showdown against the evil elites. Consequently, this framework is helpful in explaining why conspiracy theories are useful tools for overcoming the collective action problem to mobilizing people to vote, participate in political protests, or any other social movement activity.

Populism and Conspiracy Theories

The rise of populist parties in the West has generally coincided with the loosely defined "post-truth" era in which misinformation, conspiracy theories, and "alternative facts" reign.[1] Many of these same parties and politicians are both the receptors and propagators of such beliefs. Donald Trump, for example, is especially known for diffusing some of the more fanciful conspiracy theories during his time in office, such as the belief that Barack Obama is not a natural born citizen (Barkun, 2017; Sawyer, 2020, 2021), that Hillary Clinton murders political enemies and whistle-blowers (Sawyer, 2020), that a "deep state" was intent on ousting him from power (Moynihan, 2020) and that his success in the 2020 Presidential Election had been stolen from him through mass voter fraud. While Donald Trump is a clear outlier in this regard, this relationship is still prominent in Europe (Kubát and Mejstřík, 2020) and other regions of the world. Hungary's Viktor Orban has regularly used the image of philanthropist George Soros and European Union elites as a target to rally voters to his anti-immigrant and anti-EU policies, such as the "Soros Plan" (*Soros-terv*) (Orban, 2019). The *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in Austria (Leconte, 2019), the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany, the *Front National* (Rassemblement National) in France, and *Fidesz* in Hungary have all sympathized with the Great Replacement conspiracy that alleges that European Union elites are planning to invite a wave of migrants into the bloc, erasing any cultural, religious, and political power of the "native" population in the process.

This is not by any means a new phenomenon. Many historical cases of populism reveal similar rhetorical patterns for explaining political phenomenon and constructing the narratives between themselves and their opponents, with Joseph McCarthy, the American People's Party, and the dictatorship of Juan Peron being prime examples. Historian David Brion Davis (1971) has pointed out the extent to which the populist motif within conspiratorial narratives continues to reappear throughout history. The original People's Party in the late 19th century, for example, was known for spreading the conspiracy theory of the "Crime of 1873" which alleged a conspiracy by British and American bankers to reimpose a tyranny over the American people, starting with the devaluation of silver (Ostler 1995). The belief was so prominent that it made it into the party's platform in 1892 and William Jennings Bryan's famous "Cross of Gold" speech (Kramnick and Lowi, 2009, pp.801-806, 809-815). Ostler (1995) argues that this conspiracy theory, which was spread through party-affiliated newspapers and pamphlets such a *Seven Financial Conspiracies Which Have Enslaved the American People*, were an important way in which the party spread their ideas, mobilized their constituency, and developed ties outside of states where

Farmers' Alliance organizations existed. As Davis (1971, pp.187-198) mentions, the "Crime of 1873" served as a mechanism to simplify the complexities of the rapidly changing American society in ways that rendered it possible for common citizens to understand: a binary in which the evildoers had "betrayed" the common people.

Similarly, Juan and Evita Perón used the narrative of the savior and the conspiracy to great effect during their speeches to masses of *descamisados* to mobilize them at pivotal moments (Vassiliou, 2017). Juxtaposed to the blind trust placed in the image of Juan Perón was the conspiracy of the *Oligarquía* against Perón, and as an extension, against the people. Any opponents to the Peróns' leadership were identified as being a part of the oligarchs who collaborated with the forces of "imperialism" and "capitalism". According to Eva Perón's own admission, the image of the oligarch was not to be meant literally, but to equate to all enemies of the people:

> And let it be clear, that when I speak of oligarchy I mean all those who in 1946 opposed Perón: conservatives, radicals, socialists, and communists (Perón, 1982, pp.213-214).

On the whole, a number of scholars have found that conspiracy theories are much more prominent the further one goes to the right of the political spectrum. Priester (2012) and Wodak (2015) consider conspiracism to be a core component of radical right-wing populism. In Kubát and Mejstřík's (2020) survey of populist parties in Europe, they found that all ten populist radical right parties included in the study had strong conspiracist tendencies among them. Populists such as Donald Trump and Viktor Orban are clear examples of a worldview that is constructed around the constant threat of a conspiracy from enemies of the people. This is due in part to the far right's ideological emphasis on a manichean worldview, division of society into strict in-groups and out-groups, and authoritarianism as a core ideological component to the populist radical right worldview, which tend to be stronger predictors of conspiracism (van Prooijen, 2018).

That is not to say that conspiracism is non-existent outside of the far right. In Venezuela, the charismatic Hugo Chavez was known for promoting the belief that the Punto Fijo gathering in 1958 to promote democracy in the country had been a conspiracy by a cabal of elites to impose a tyranny on the hard-working Venezuelan people (Andrade, 2019). In Italy, Mancosu, Vassallo, and Vezzoni (2017) show that belief in a number of common conspiracy theories is predictive of support for not only the far right Lega Nord and Fratelli d'Italia, but also the center-right populist party Forza Italia led by Silvio Berlusconi and the non-ideological, yet strongly populist Five Star Movement. After the collapse of the Italian party system following the *Tangentopoli* scandals, Berlusconi would regularly speak of communist conspiracies among the opposition to oust him from power (Friedman, 2015, pp.87-110), and referred to the judges that presided over his corruption trials as the "red togas" and "communists". Slovakia's Robert Fico, leader of the social populist SMER - Social Democracy has resorted to similar conspiratorial narratives as Viktor Orban involving the image of the "meddling" George Soros to explain why Andrej Kiska called for changes in the government following the slaying of a journalist. Stoica (2017) and Vassiliou (2017) have posited that ultimately, it is impossible to be populist without the belief in a conspiracy of some shape or form. Thalman (2019) and Uscinski (2019) have both considered individuals on both the left and the right to be equally susceptible to become immersed in conspiracism,

while psychologists van Prooijen, Krouwel, and Pollet (2015) has demonstrated through testing that both poles demonstrate a higher tendency to believe in them.

The existence of an immoral, corrupt, or disingenuous establishment does not necessarily imply that they conspire against the people. In the United States, coastal liberal elites are often the subject of conspiracy theories, however, the broader argument made by cultural conservatives is that these upper-class elites are out of touch with the people of the "fly-over" states and seek to impose cultural values on them that the people are not prepared to accept. On the left, criticism of the elite is usually in the form of economic grievances and systemic economic interest which do not necessarily imply the existence of a conspiracy. There are clear examples where the narrative of conspiracy does not play a strong role whatsoever as can be seen in the case of Podemos. Thus, while conspiracy theories are more prominent, on the whole, among populist movements, and are more likely to find their way into the rhetoric of populist leadership, they are not an immutable characteristic of populism, but a tendency (Taggart, 2019). The most reasonable relationship between the two has been expressed by Bergmann and Butter (2020) who claim that "conspiracy theories are a non-necessary element of populist discourses".

As was previously mentioned, at the core of the populist worldview is the basic binary division of society into the corrupt "elite" and the pure and virtuous "people" (Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 1995; Urbinati, 2019). The ideational approach to populism goes further in emphasizing the necessarily moral dimension placed on both the conception of the people and the elite; the elite are not simply divided from the people through economic or political interests, different belief systems, or opinions. Instead, they are morally bankrupt, disingenuous, or evil (Mudde 2004). The people and the elite are not strictly defined categories as each can be defined and redefined based upon the imagined community the populist seeks to attract to their movement and attack and constantly use this discursive construction as a rhetorical device (Mudde, 2004). It is for this reason that Laclau (2005) famously referred to concepts as 'the people' and 'the elite' to be "empty signifiers" which were constantly subject to a struggle for meaning. In a similar manner, conspiracy theories also target powerful forces in our societies (Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Castanho Silva et al., 2017) whether they be political elites, government bureaucracies, rich capitalists, multinational corporations, or international organizations, and define their relationship to the common person through the prism of manichaeism; a struggle between good and evil (Bergmann, 2018; Hauwaert, 2012; Yla-Antilla, 2018). It is these core components of anti-elitism and manichaeism that permits the merger of the two beliefs into a cohesive whole. Fenster (2008) has argued that all conspiracy theories hold an implicitly "populist core". This coherence permits for the theoretical merger of the two into a narrative that alleges one's establishment opponents to be engaged in a secret plot against the populist leader and their followers.

Bounded Rationality and the Emotional Correlates of Political Behavior

The study of political behavior based on the belief conspiracy theories presumes a theory that moves beyond the confines of the original rational choice theory. As both research from scholars of populism and conspiracism have demonstrated, the choices that are made based on these beliefs and attitudes are heavily mediated by extra-rational psychological mechanisms such anger, distrust, uncertainty and

resentment. Populism is inextricably linked to the emotional side of the human consciousness, so much so that political science scholars are brought to question their long devotion to the idea of the fully rational individual (Cossarini and Vallespin, 2019). Even in the economic sciences, where rational choice first gained prominence, theorists are now arguing that rationality is more "bounded" than originally believed (Jones, 1999). Affect, among other things, directs the individual towards sets of choices. While rational choice has been helpful in explaining political behaviour on its most basic level, through notions of preferences and utility, emotions often have larger explanatory power for populist politics.

Anger is an emotion commonly found in populist supporters. As populists argue that the core democratic foundation of popular sovereignty has been usurped from the people by the establishment, appeals to anger, outrage, and feelings of injustice are primary mechanisms (Laclau, 1977; Laraña et al., 1994) for mobilizing citizens with grievances for political activity such as voting (Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza, 2020; Vasilopoulou and Wagner, 2017; Vasilopoulos, et al., 2018) and demonstrations (Anduiza, Guinjoan, and Rico, 2019). Unlike interpersonal distrust and dissatisfaction are feelings that can lead to apathy, anger as an emotion has an activating character due to its "moral" character (Skitka and Bauman, 2008; Skitka, Hanson, and Wisneski, 2017; Van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears, 2008; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2009; Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010), that helps to activate the "latent" stereotypes of citizens (Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza, 2017). The conspiracist component of populist movements elicits these feelings of injustice due to the understanding that they have been personally "wronged" or "harmed" by powerful establishment forces. Experimental methods have demonstrated that belief in certain political conspiracy theories can lead the individual to refocus their activity towards more anti-systemic behavior, developing distrust towards the government (Kim and Cao, 2016), increased preference for non-normative forms of political engagement (Imhoff, Dieterle, and Lamberty, 2021), increased tendency to be violent (Jolley and Paterson, 2020), and develop populist attitudes (Hameleers, 2020).

Belief in conspiracy theories and support for populist candidates also increase due to several similar contextual conditions. Fast-paced social, economic, and cultural changes associated with the transition to post-industrial society have been cited as a major catalyst for the current populist wave in the West (Mickenberg, 2013). A common theme among this literature is that grievances associated with economic decline or socio-cultural transformations to distrust the institutions of society and sympathize with populist messaging that attempts to rally the "losers" of such changes to revolt against them (Mickenberg, 2013; Mudde, 2004). Psychological studies have pointed to a number of "demand" factors related to social alienation and insecurity rendering the individual to be more likely to believe in conspiracy theories: feelings of economic or social insecurity (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Goertzel, 1994; Volkan, 1985), cynicism, and dissatisfaction with the status quo as being relevant predictors (Miller, Saunders, and Farhart, 2015; Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Furnham, 2010; Volkan, 1985). For their part, conspiracy theories arise from feelings of uncertainty in individuals that occur during times of precarity or insecurity and the individual's need to provide an explanation for the unsettling phenomenon (van Prooijen, 2018). This permits human beings to see the world with perfect order, clarity, and predictability and handle the gap between the unknown and certain contradictions between known "facts" and the individual's worldview. Conspiracy theories in the populist movement, thus, can have the effect of simplifying these complex changes in society in a way that explains their

perceived deprivation and redirects their anger at a simple scapegoat. As with the trope of the "elite", the narrative of the conspiracy succeeds in translating and encapsulating the demands of a people who see themselves as disenfranchised, marginalized, or oppressed into a concept or catch-all term that oversimplifies the political terrain, focusing on one or several individuals to be at fault, and fills it with highly emotional content, rendering it appealing to the common person.

This mistrust of mainstream political institutions (Rooduijn, van der Brug, and de Lange, 2016) and dissatisfaction with the state of democracy (Kaltwasser and Hauwaert, 2020) are among the most common correlates of populist voters. The result is that the relationship between the populist leader and their supporters becomes based on its total opposite; the leader is seen as the last vestige of democracy in a world turned upside-down by the establishment with the trust endowed in them resembling a faith-based belief. For the supporter, the leader can do no wrong (Urbinati, 2019). The relationship becomes one that is not conducive to public accountability as trust and love of the leader are sufficient to disregard any flaws. This can clearly be observed in the case of seemingly "impure" politicians from elite backgrounds such as Donald Trump and Silvio Berlusconi who have both known their share of political, business, and personal controversies while in office, yet receive almost blind support from their followers. Similar relationships between mistrust in governing bodies or the mainstream media can be observed in those with conspiratorial beliefs (Algan, et al. 2017; Fuchs, 2018; Jylha, Strimling, and Rydgren, 2019; Krasodomski-Jones, 2019). This corresponds to a logic of, "if "they've done it" before, they'll do it again", leading to conspiratorial narratives to become more believable.

In terms of argumentative strategies, populists have a tendency to exhibit what Saurette and Gunster (2011) call *epistemological populism*, which places value on the common sense of the common people and eschews the knowledge of political leaders, media analysis, and experts. Further research has demonstrated that this is indeed a commonality in populist discourse (Cramer, 2016; Hawkins, 2010; Hofstadter, 2008 [1964]; Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Wodak, 2015). With these claims, it is argued that the knowledge of the experts is invalid because they are 'out-of-touch' with the needs of the common people and lack access to the practical knowledge of everyday life, leading them to claim that the people have "had enough" of experts telling them what to do. Conspiracy theories often form from this kind of knowledge when they are based on folk-wisdom: various notions of common sense, feelings, identity, or sentiments of anti-intellectualism. Belief in conspiracy theories is often directly related to these intuitive and commonsensical notions; many individuals who believe in more than a few conspiracy theories, or those that are fantastical in nature, are believed to have "monological belief systems" that do not "engage in dialogue with their context" (Goertzel, 1994). The presumption is that they have "closed" minds wherein each belief serves as evidence for another, and instead of searching for factual evidence to test their beliefs, they resort to ideological arguments.

Populism and Common Sense

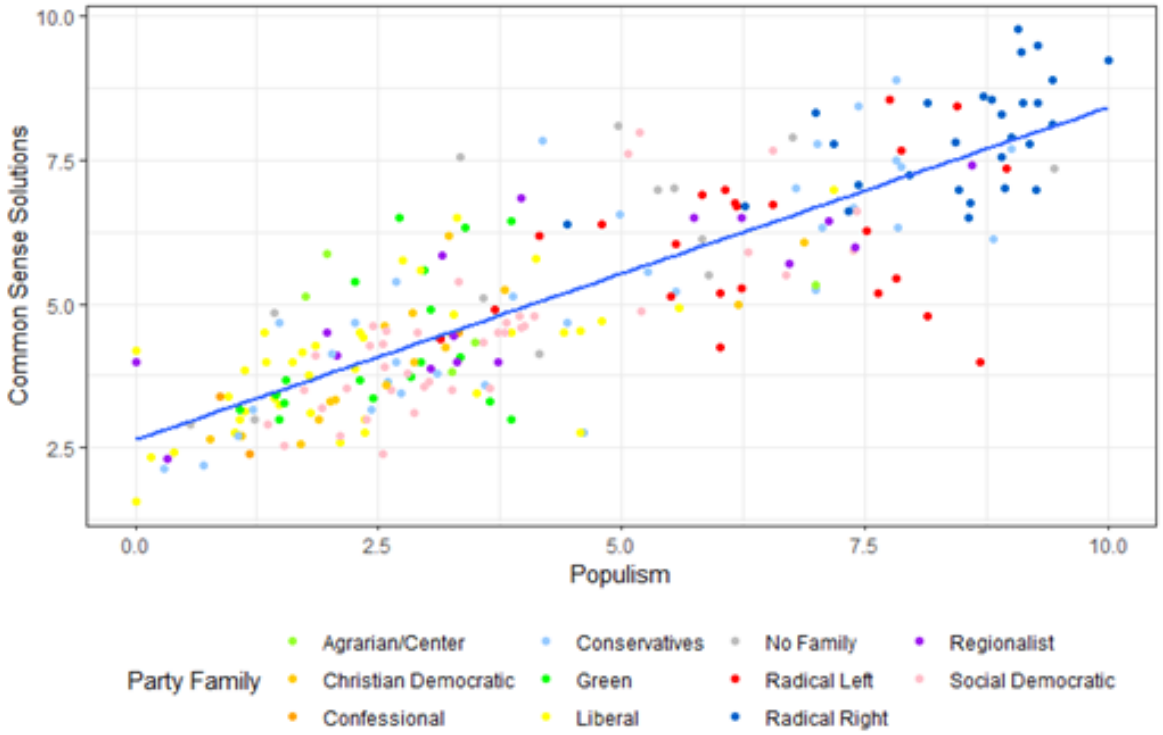

Figure 1 Source: Reproduced by the author from Meijers and Zaslove (2020a, 2020b).
Note: Each data point represents a political party in continental Europe.

The Function of Conspiracy Theories for Populist Movements

Whether it is through tweeting (Kramer 2017), mass rallies, interactive online platforms, or "going to the people", the constant interaction with the people is common to populist politicians and serves as the source of its strength in the political realm in so far as it provides them with cultural authenticity. This "permanent campaigning" helps the leader to retain a consistent connection to the people and reaffirm their identity with them (Urbinati 2019). Ostiguy (2017) and Moffitt (2019) have shown the tendency of populists to emphasize the "low" end of the high-low socio-cultural axis that emphasizes passionate and colorful language to appeal to supporters, appeals to "common sense" notions, and exhibits "bad manners" that disrupts the accepted norms on political performance, all of which makes supporters of the populist develop emotional attachments to the leader who they consider to be "one of us". Another feature of the populist's performative repertoire is what Moffitt (2019) refers to as the "performance of crisis" which plays on the distrust of and anger at establishment politics as well as the fear of the Other by passionately dramatizing a situation in which the people are believed to be under threat.

Often, this has come in the form of conspiratorial narratives. Fenster (2008), refers to conspiracy theories as a "populist theory of power" that allows the powerless a simplified means to expose the powerful and attempt to redistribute these power relations. As with populism's Manichean division of society between the loosely defined "people" and "establishment", conspiracy theories easily fit within

this ideological framework to provide the individual with an easily understandable narrative with which to criticize and "Other" the establishment and counter the "regime of truth". Implicit in the conspiratorial beliefs is a search for a more transparent society. "Weaving" these narratives, as described in Zuquete's conceptualization of "Missionary Politics" permits a populist leader to rally a core group of supporters to their side (Zuquete, 2008).

The merging of populist attitudes and conspiratorial narratives which allege a secret conspiracy by establishment figures against "the good people" can lead to a relationship that becomes "quasi-religious" in character. In lieu of a simple "manipulation" of the marginalized or unsophisticated masses by a "demagogic" leader, the role of the "conspiracy" aids in the symbolic construction of a "semi-religious dimension" to the movement with a heroic martyr for the cause of the people and a collective mission to stamp out evil.[10] The image of the evil conspiring elite serves to give the bond between the leader and their supporters intensity that permits them to be mobilized for "heroic missions" through the voting booth or through protests (Weyland, 2017). By attacking "enemies of the people", and confronting the "counter-church" of political opponents (Vassiliou, 2017), the leader not only demonizes their opponents in such a way that leads their supporters not only to hate, but also develop a sense of urgency which necessitates their political defeat. At the same time, the image of the authentic populist "defender of the people, who is "at the same time the expression, guide and 'savior' of the people" (Taguieff 2007, p. 10), endows himself with saint-like characteristics. These moralized notions of politics have been shown to lead people to forsake material gains, oppose compromises with competitors, and punish those politicians who do (Ryan, 2016), providing the populist with a core constituency that they can mobilize against opponents.

From these theoretical premises, the function of conspiratorial rhetoric, thus, is two-fold; (1) conspiracy theories merge with the anti-elitist dimension of populism to demonize, "Other", and attribute blame to political opponents by depicting the political establishment, elitists, and minority groups as not simply illegitimate or immoral political actors, but evil, amoral, and threatening. This narrative makes one move from feeling "dispossessed" in one's own country to a sense of urgency, an intensification of the conflict to a point where the survival of the country, the nation, or the "good people" are at stake. The notion that the opposition is "evil" renders supporters uncompromising in their mission to struggle against political opponents and willing to use any means necessary to do so. Franks, Bangerter, and Bauer's (2013) conception of the "quasi-religious mentality" places special emphasis on conspiracy theories framed as a conflicts that risk "sacred cultural values" such as freedoms, religious beliefs, or cultural traditions as a key ingredient for motivating intense commitment towards collective action[11]; (2) By positioning oneself as opposed to the conspiring "enemies of the people", the populist leader uses this narrative to demonstrate populist authenticity as being "on the side of the people" in this epic showdown. The "defender of the people" can become a force that common people can rally behind to struggle against powerful conspiring forces. In this respect, conspiratorial narratives can serve an important communicative function for promoting relevant "demand" factors necessary for the support for populist candidates and provide a solution to the collective action problem when attempting to mobilize their support in the political arena.

Conclusion

This study aims to develop a formal theory for understanding the prominence of conspiratorial ideation among populist movements as well as the functions they serve in populist movements, by pulling from the literature on the role of affect in political behavior, the various conceptualizations of populism, and the sociological and psychological literature on conspiracism. I argue that the existence of conspiracism in populist movements cannot be fully understood without taking into account the role of emotions, intuition, common sense, which serve as the basis for the support for the leader. As the point of departure, I point to two mechanisms common to populist movements that serve to "attract" conspiratorial ways of thinking: (1) The cohesion of the populist worldview and those of conspiracy theories, which both imply a group of "elites" or "enemies of the people" that are destroying the people's way of life; (2) The emotional side of the leader-follower dynamic in populist movements which corresponds to conspiracist cognitive patterns. In terms of their function, conspiracy theories serve certain mobilizational purposes that benefit the populist movement; (1) by "Othering" political opponents, and attributing blame to an "evil", or "conspiring" cohort of elitists, supporters of the populist feel a sense of urgency in the struggle between the two opposing forces that must be defeated in order to save the "heartland"; (2) by positioning oneself as being opposed to the plotting "enemies of the people", the populist leader demonstrates a kind of populist authenticity that 'proves' their support for the 'good people' in the showdown against the evil elites. Consequently, this framework is helpful in explaining why conspiracy theories are useful tools for overcoming the collective action problem to mobilizing people to vote, participate in political protests, or any other social movement activity.

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A Brazil of two Brazils: How populism and fascism enlightens integralism and Bolsonarism

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Abstract

The worldwide process of democratic recession, now in its fourteenth consecutive year according to the Freedom House, has revived the discussion on which term to use to name the anti-democratic movements that are spreading all over the planet. The planet reacted with surprise when Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a self-declared anti-democrat, was elected in the 2018 Brazilian elections. Bolsonaro, despite having been a deputy for over 30 years, sold himself as an outsider, with the traditional populist discourse to fight the elites, spreading manichaean polarization and aiming to return to an imaginary past. Much has been discussed about authoritarianism, totalitarianism, reactionaryism, populism, fascism, among other concepts. In the specific case of fascism, there is a disagreement about the possibility of expanding and moving the concept beyond its emergence in Italy in 1920. If possible, this inevitably ends up expanding it and considering that, in a different space-time, fascism will acquire new characteristics, although it retains points that allow it to continue to be understood as such. Thus, this paper will deal with the opposition between the concepts of populism and fascism in the light of Bolsonarism, as well as its relationship with other Brazilian populist/fascist movement, the Integralism. Oppositions and similarities between the contemporary application of both objects will be worked on, taking specific characteristics as points of intersection. This will make it possible to expand the state of the art regarding the conceptual discussion of fascism and populism and to understand which concept has the best applicability for the specific case of Bolsonarism.

Keywords: fascism, populism, bolsonarism, integralism, Jair Bolsonaro

Fascism and populism

Freedom House (2020), American institution, reported the 14th year in a row of declining democracy in the world. In the specific Brazilian case, Latinobarómetro pointed 2018 as the year with the lowest support for democracy in over two decades, with only 34%. The midlife crisis of democracy, as David Runciman (2018, p. 233) calls the process of democratic fragility that the world has been going through, resurrects the discussion about the concept used to name these movements that have spread around the planet in recent years. Regardless of terminology, some characteristics of these movements are repeated in a pattern, with obvious idiosyncratic changes between each state. These characteristics make it possible to include these movements in a common concept. In this comparison, there is a

notable theoretical division between thinkers who prefer to work with the idea of populism and the ones who prefer to use fascism.

It is essential, in political theory, to understand that concepts are polysemic. They necessarily need to be open to different interpretations to absorb new aspects and experiences. In political science, this reflects on concepts that have different nuances. What was conventionally understood by liberalism in the US, for example, is different from French liberalism. In Brazil, Burke would be unable to understand those who call themselves conservatives. Likewise, notions such as populism and fascism also have different interpretations. In the case of fascism, in particular, there is a division into two main lines of thought: that which seeks to limit it to the original Italian experience, of which one can think on researchers such as Renzo de Felice (1976, p. 277-280) and Michael Mann (2008, p. 495), and that which seeks to expand it to include contemporary political movements, on which Robert Paxton (2007) is one of the main names. Nevertheless, if contemporary governments are taken as fascists, it is essential that the term be malleable, since the current geopolitical context is very different from the beginning of the 20th century.

Regardless of terminology, it is noticeable that the periphery imports concepts from the center, ignoring in the process the complex subjectivities of the South. It is possible that ideas such as fascism are simply not applicable in the same way in the context of Latin America because the region's idiosyncrasies are colossal. However, just as ideologies such as liberalism and conservatism express their own versions in Brazil, possibly the same can happen with fascism. Rafael Mesquita (2017, p. 198), reinforces this argument by stating that it is possible to displace political concepts despite local idiosyncrasies, as long as relevant variables are considered.

As it is a polysemic and extensively studied concept, it is obviously impossible to deal with all possible variables and existing currents of interpretation in a paper. Therefore, this work will draw mainly from the interpretation of the aforementioned Robert Paxton (2007) in *Anatomy of Fascism*, who understands it, in short, as necessarily being an authoritarian, nationalist, populist and reactionary movement, based on the masses, guided by a rhetoric of a return to a non-existent past, which inevitably pits itself against a dehumanized objective enemy, incarnated as the epitome of a messiah with superhuman powers, based on a paranoid conspiracy. It is important to note that for authors such as Rob Riemen (2020), the economic guidelines of Italian Fascism are not essential to understand fascism.

The split between thinkers like Paxton and Mann, between malleable fascism and hermetic fascism, can be summed up in a binary opposition: for the former, fascism initially appears as an aggregation of characteristics amalgamated in a movement; while the second believes that the movement came first, the concept later. This interpretation by Paxton is taken up by authors such as Mark Bray (2019,), who states that "there is enough historical evidence to assert that fascism is always a virtuality present in any modern state" (p.16), and Rob Riemen (2020), who interprets the fascism as the "barbaric son of mass democracy". Following Paxton's ideas, one can interpret fascism as the simultaneous manifestation of four other concepts:

I) Authoritarianism – Any historical or contemporary example points out that there is no fascism that is not anti-democratic in its very essence. Fascism absorbs authoritarianism in one-sidedness and the need for a strong leader who does not bend to anyone.

II) Nationalism – The idea of the nation-state is for fascism as freedom is for liberalism or equality for socialism.

III) Reactionarism – Taking Reactionarism as a reaction to a supposed degeneration, following Maistre's (1974) ideas. It is essential for fascism to put itself as a reaction, plunged into the melancholy of taking the political context as degenerate, counting that only a messiah can prevent this decay. Even though Mussolini (2006, p. 248) tries to distance himself from Maistre in his doctrine, his work drinks a lot from him. Hence the melancholic discourse of returning to a mythical past, which in general does not exist, and the paranoiac conspiracy of believing that the objective enemy is destroying the nation.

IV) Populism – Discarding the idea of populism as an irresponsible expenditure of public money, common among theorists in Brazil, but interpreting it as a mass movement, disseminated by all social classes, against supposed invisible elites, guided by a messianic leader.

In short: fascism is understood here as a movement that is simultaneously authoritarian, nationalist, reactionary and populist, as stated by Griffin, mentioned by Robert Paxton (2007), a "palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism" (p.47). It's obvious that even though a fascist is always a populist, the reciprocal is not true. However, with the current anti-democratic global wave, both concepts have been used widely as disfigured synonyms, depending mostly on the speaker's ideological position.

For instance: Yascha Mounk (2019, p.51) characterizes populism as the action or discourse of retaking power to the people, a power that was supposed taken by a corrupt elite, usually linked to a specific minority; necessarily depending on a manichean antagonizing discourse, the opposite of what Chantal Mouffe calls by the agonistic democracy, the return to the mythical past, the figure of a messiah, and the spread through conspiracy paranoia. Jason Stanley (2018, pp.14, 16, 67) characterizes fascism as also based on an antagonizing vision of democracy, of returning to the mythical past, guided by a messiah, founded on permanent paranoia that sees omnipresent enemies where they don't even exist. Laclau (2005, p.4) shows that: "Populism itself tends to deny any identification or classification with the Right / Left dichotomy"; Robert Paxton (2007, p.27) does the same: "The culmination of the fascist reaction to the political map defined in relation to the left and right was to claim that they had made it obsolete, being 'neither left nor right', having transcended these archaic divisions and united with nation." Mounk (2019, p.43) says that populism, despite its anti-elitism, is a movement that covers all social sectors; Madeleine Albright (2018, p.27) shows that fascism, in what is its biggest difference in relation to pure authoritarianism, depends on all social sectors to legitimize and disseminate. Populism, continuing with Laclau (2005, p.8), is inevitably contradictory per se; fascism, according to Umberto Eco (2018, p. 32), has always been a "depository of contradictions". Regarding these contradictory characteristics, Laclau (2005, p.4) states that: "In that case, the only thing we are left with is the impossibility of defining the term – not a very satisfactory situation as far as social analysis is concerned." Paxton (2007, p.36) shows, in the similar way, the inability of an absolute definition of fascism: "the definitions are inherently limiting. They outline a static picture of something that is better perceived in motion, and show as 'frozen statuary' something that is better understood if viewed as a process". It is evident that both have differences between them, but with the new anti-democratic wave both concepts have come to be widely used to conceptualize the same movements, depending to a great extent on the emitter of the discourse. As Guilherme Simões Reis shows:

> The confusion that this fragile idea of populism imposes on democracy is significant. Is popular politics always demagogic? This seems to be what some populist authors think. While the extreme right grows in different parts of the world, based on prejudice, attack on rights, hatred and fear, all projects that think about alternatives to capitalism and how to maintain rights and seek equality are accused of being similar to these neofascism. Thus, everyone would be populist, except those who defend the responsible maintenance of the status quo. (Reis, 2020).

In an aspect, both concepts have become war cries to classify ideologies opposed to the emitter's discourse. For example, as Hochstetler (2007) points out, until not so long ago The Economist classified Latin American governments as liberal or populist, with no grey area. Perhaps fascism, following Laclau's idea on empty signifier, should be thought more as a method of politics and less like an ideology.

Foucault (1979, p.77) said that "the masses, at the time of fascism, want somebody to exercise power, somebody who, however, is not them, since power will be exercised over them [...]; and yet they want this power, they want that power to be exercised." Although Mounk avoids working with the idea of fascism, as has already been suggested, the concept of populism he develops deals with the same idea: the need for people, in a time of frustration and disillusionment with the political establishment, to eagerly desire a "strong man", regardless of his preparation for the position.

The *modus operandi* of these authoritarian populists follows a pattern and has been widely reported in recent years: the Manichean classification of the world into a binary opposition. Consequently, all those who do not support these groups are automatically classified as "evil". The media, opposition and universities are prime targets, and invisible enemies appear everywhere. If there is one common characteristic, despite all the differences, between these groups, it is paranoid conspiracy.

A strength in Mounk's work is to emphasize the difference between liberalism and democracy, a discussion that has been rarely raised by other authors on the subject. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the supposed end of history, man has become used to the fallacy that democracy and liberalism are synonymous, that there is no democracy without individual freedom, and that there is no individual freedom without democracy. Viktor Orbán classifies his regime as an "illiberal democracy", an Orwellian name that synthesizes his authoritarianism and that of so many others: a veiled dictatorship, with a I democracy, non-existent in practice, with restriction of freedoms individuals and free thought (Mounk, 2018, p. 18). An efficient method of "soft dictatorship" developed by the Putin school of governing.

Mounk divides these "soft dictatorships" into two types: anti-democratic liberalism and illiberal democracy. In other words, the notion of liberal democracy splits in two. The first is characterized by a closed system, which excludes the population, through representation, from political participation, concentrating power in the hands of an oligarchic elite. Or, as Robert Dahl (2005, p. 31) had already pointed out almost 50 years ago in *Polyarchy*, a hegemony or a semi-polyarchy, considering that, for Dahl, only an inclusive and egalitarian regime could be classified as polyarchy, that is, as close as possible to a democracy – in his vision democracy being a utopian ideal to be pursued but never achieved. Meanwhile, Mounk's anti-democratic liberalism, like Dahl's hegemony or semi-polyarchy, is marked by the concentration of power and limitation of freedom only for the elite, while the rest of the

population is progressively excluded. The second system, illiberal democracy, is a consequence of the first. The politically invisible population turns out to be easy prey for anti-democratic populist movements, which supposedly aim to subjugate the first system, although, as happened in 2018 Brazil, they are often part of that very elite. As Jason Stanley (2018, p.82) points out, “democracy cannot flourish on a terrain poisoned by inequality”. The people are thus captured by the discourse of the “strong man”, who will return the country to the times of glory, regardless of whether the death of real democracy is an inevitable consequence of this process. Added to this is the decrease in representativeness in representative democracy. Although, by its very definition, representative democracy implies a certain distancing of the people from the political, given that the former is largely unable to take direct decisions, there is a rise in the feeling of this distancing. That is, democracy is supposedly less and less representative, and professional politicians are progressively more distanced from popular opinion (Mounk, 2018, p.64).

Perhaps the biggest flaw in Mounk’s work – a flaw that is not unique to him, but to most books on contemporary anti-democratic movements – is selling his ideas as if they were new, when Robert Dahl, half a century ago, already pointed out the same issues with different nomenclatures, emphasizing the importance of realizing that full democracy is impossible and utopian. All the more so, Mounk’s insistence on the label of authoritarian populism rejects the idea that part of these anti-democratic movements are in fact fascist movements. However, if on the one hand it is really necessary to avoid elasticizing the concept of fascism so as not to encompass everything, on the other hand only through intellectual juggling it is possible to classify Jair Bolsonaro as just an “extreme right populist, ultra-conservative and nationalist”. Even because a right-wing, ultra-conservative and nationalist populist is precisely a fascist.

Integralism and Bolsonarism

Working with a specific concept and its displacements allow the expansion of the state of the art on at least two fronts: adding idiosyncratic elements from different contexts to the understanding of the chosen concept; and, accordingly, to realize whether its applicability to Brazil also deepens in the understanding of these specific historical clippings, considering the interpretation that a concept provides to the object. For example, the very interpretation of Bolsonarism is shaped according to its shown similarities with historical fascism. In the social sphere, working on the reconstruction of fascism allows to help in the process of rescuing the concept of its misuse, by groups that see it excessively (Albright, 2018, p.17) and by groups that do not see it at all (Riemen, 2012, p.12). Due theorization makes it possible to displace both problematic views and deepen the debate in a concept that has been excessively distorted since practically its emergence, when communists began to call social democrats social-fascists (Bray, 2018, pp.74 -75).

In early 2020, Brazil recalled with surprise that Integralism, a political movement that emerged in the early 1930s and was openly inspired by fascism, despite having fragmented, had not disappeared. After the broadcast of a film in Netflix featuring a Jesus Christ who supposedly had homosexual relations, some members of one of several contemporary Integralist factions threw a 128reside cocktail at the

company's production in an action that almost victimized a security guard. Supposedly the same group vandalized the university UNIRIO by removing and burning anti-fascism flags raised by the students, as well as threatening them.

Flags burning

Figure 1 Note: Reproduction of a frame of the video in which an Integralist faction burns antifascism flags displayed at UNIRIO, while says "long live to the nationalist homeland" (Kapa, 2018).

Plínio Salgado was openly inspired by Italian Fascism when creating Integralism, doing so after a meeting with Mussolini. Mussolini would even finance Plínio's Integralism in its beginning (Gonçalves & Neto, 2020, p. 13). And, until its self-exile with the persecution of Integralism by the Estado Novo, it is not absurd to interpret Integralism as being, in fact, a Brazilian version of fascism. Its nationalist aspects were the most notable, from the clothes that highlight the colors of the Brazilian flag, to the motto Anauê, which translates from the Tupi language "you are my relative" (Gonçalves & Neto, 2020, p.19). As a reactionary, the movement sought to return to a supposedly glorious past, ranging from monarchy to even, and more strongly, Indianism. As an authoritarian, and following what was preached by Italian fascism, it asserted himself against democracy in its liberal format, and in favor of what it meant by new forms of democracy. At this point, populism enters into a mixture with all the other concepts, considering that Integralism inherited an anti-elite discourse similar to Italian fascism, suggesting that power should be returned to the true Brazilians, a power that was distorted by corrupt elites linked to international communism and / or Judaism – depending on the internal current, if linked more to Plínio or Gustavo Barroso – and restore national glory. As a popular movement, it spread to all sectors and social classes. In many aspects, therefore, it approached the paranoid conspiracy that Bolsonarism would later absorb, in the reverie of imagining a worldwide conspiracy by a communist financial elite. In other words, Integralism, like Italian Fascism, projected itself as a third way, an alternative between communism and liberalism, which it saw as two heads of the same parasite. In this sense, it recalls similar contemporary speeches, in addition to Bolsonaro, like Orbán, with his defense of an alleged illiberal democracy, or a new democratic format.

A two-headed parasite

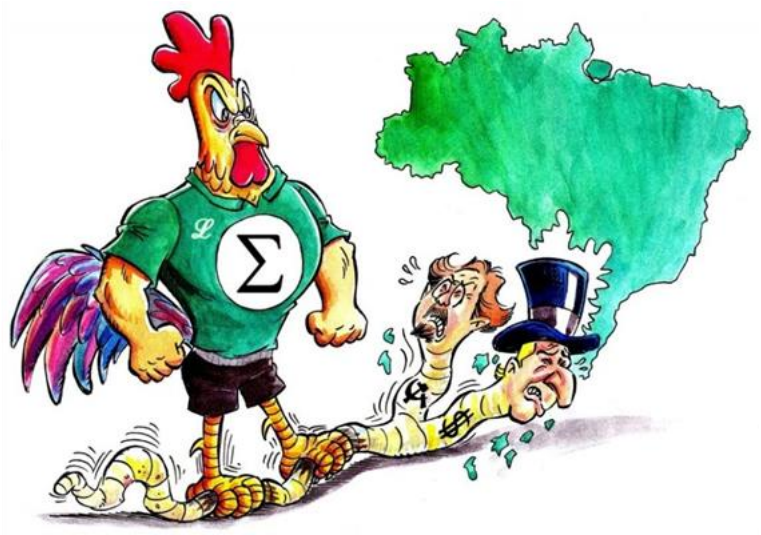

Figure 2 Note: Cartoon displaying Integralism mascot, the Tupã Rooster, attacking a two-head parasite representing communism and liberalism (Gonçalves & Neto, 2020, p.170).

With the dissolution of the Estado Novo and Plínio's return from self-exile, Integralism enters a new phase. It does not have the same strength as before, when it reached one million followers in a country of 35 million people and was the biggest fascist inspired movement in Latin America. It is no longer an anti-system movement as before, on the contrary, it asserts itself in defense of the young and short Brazilian democracy. In other words, it is institutionalized through a political party, the PRP. In a way, it is not absurd to say that Integralism was absorbed by the establishment, which would no longer tolerate, in the newly democratic and post-war scenario, openly fascist incursions. Plínio's speeches becomes less anti-system, less inflamed, less outsider, and more political. Although in the two decades that followed it continued with some fascist traits, its populism and its authoritarianism cooled down. His nationalism remained unchanged. However, he no longer preached, at least not so often, against the destruction of an elite. The discourse against the red danger remains and its authoritarianism returns with the sign of the times, when, in the early 60s, he supports the military coup.

Following Plinio's death in the 70's, Integralism was fragmented into several independent groups. Some are more extreme, associated with Nazi and anti-Semitic groups, others more restrained, and claim to be democratic. One of these groups, the Nationalist Popular Insurgency Command, was responsible for the attacks on UNIRIO and Porta dos Fundos. Fragmented, contemporary Integralists were absorbed by other nationalist political parties and movements, such as PRONA and Bolsonaro's PSL. One of the terrorists in the attacks was affiliated to the PSL (G1, 2020). Another integralist activist is part of one of the government ministries. Integralist groups held marches and demonstrations in support of the

Brazilian president, considered as “the least distant candidate from Christian and Brazilian values embodied in the motto ‘God, homeland and family’” (Gonçalves & Neto, 2020, p.19).

In late 2018, Foreign Policy published an oped with the title “Jair Bolsonaro’s Model Isn’t Berlusconi. It’s Goebbels” (Finchelstein, 2018), in which the author stated that the candidate was not just another conservative populist, but someone whose propaganda and political strategy was directly inspired by fascism. An analysis that, ironically, was done 2 years before a minister of the president literally played Goebbels.

Roberto Alvim plays Goebbels.

Figure 3 Note: A comparative reproduction of a news showing former Secretary of Culture playing Goebbels.

Nevertheless, Bolsonaro is not the cause, but a symptom. Extreme right-wing movements ranging from simple nationalism to Nazism have been gestating and gathering strength in Brazil for at least 20 years, since Enéas, considered a hero by the Bolsonarists, was elected with a record amount of votes in 2002, with 1.5 million votes. A researcher at UNICAMP, Adriana Dias (Sodré, 2020), recorded an exponential increase in Nazism cells in within the last decade in the country, accounting for at least over 300. But there was a lack of a leader with populist appeal that did not focus only on nationalist circles. Thus, Bolsonaro emerges as an outsider despite his 30 years of politics and with a well-established campaign strategy, he can not only create a mass movement and demonize his objective enemy, but also succeed the support of fundamental sectors of the center and the traditional right, from liberals to conservatives, even though he has never been both.

Although not directly linked to Integralism, Bolsonarism recycles traditional aspects of its predecessor. In addition to the simultaneous manifestation of authoritarianism, nationalism, reactionarism and populism, even the mottos are recycled. “God, country and family”, the motto of Bolsonism, originally appears in Integralism (Gonçalves & Neto, 2020, p. 221). Same goes for “God above all”, while “Brazil above all” can’t fail to remember “Deutschland über alles” from Nazi Germany. His repeated quotes from

Mussolini's sentences and phrases, if they do not imply that Bolsonaro is in fact a Brazilian version of a fascist, indicate at least a strong ideological approach.

The Bolsonarist sect, however, is paradoxically heterogeneous. A sect that encompasses absolutely distinct and contradictory groups, from reactionaries to fascists, from conservatives to libertarians, from Neo-charismatics to Catholics, each with its own agenda of interests united by the desire for change through a strong man. Although his support is especially strong in some sectors, such as among Neo-charismatics and the small bourgeoisie, Bolsonaarism spreads everywhere in an ideological omnipresence that managed to capture, in one of its many oxymorons, even portions of Lulists and voters usually identified with the left. Bolsonaro was effective in amalgamating the resentment and frustration of these different groups, as well as their hopes and projections, transforming them into political energy, to the point where liberals, for example, do not hesitate to, contrary to their own ideology, give up their ideal of freedom, even though they try to sell themselves as a technical wing dissociated from the rest of the sect.

But, again in parallel with the past, Bolsonaro is the Messiah of mediocrity. Journalist Dorothy Thompson, during an interview with Hitler in 1932, stated that "I was convinced that I was facing the future dictator of Germany", while suggesting the "impressive insignificance" (URWAND, 2014, p. 212) of that figure. Bolsonaro reincarnates the sensation described by Thompson: he is a Messiah, a prophet, but only for his sect. For everyone outside, he is the most absolute expression of the petty, the small. A man steeped in resentment, capable, for example, of exonerating a public official who had fined him nearly 10 years before he was elected (G1, 2019). But Bolsonaro is the Messiah of the spirit of his time.

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Far-Right Populism as Affective Dissent

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Abstract

This paper argues that contemporary far-right populism in Germany must be understood as inherently affective project. It theorizes the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) as populist project that offers a

counter-hegemonic subject position understood as an alternative 'way of feeling into the world' through the careful orchestration of an alternative affective landscape. Furthermore, this paper takes first steps towards the development of a rather general methodological framework for exploring the affective dimension of populist subject positions reproduced through representational practices.

Keywords: populism, affect, counter-hegemony, AfD, Germany

Introduction

The success of the far-right populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is widely considered a caesura in post-war Germany. While the commemoration of the Holocaust and Second World War to the country's (supposedly) successful coming to terms with and having 'learned the lessons' from its perpetrator past (Forchtner 2016) had been considered to constitute a firm bulwark against the rise of radical right parties, the AfD constituted the end of this "German containment" (Art 2018). While this makes the AfD in Germany hardly 'just another' case of radical right populism in Europe, this paper develops an approach that understands contemporary far-right populism (in Germany) as counter-hegemonic affective landscape that challenges the dominant affective order through attuning political subjects to alternative ways of being and of feeling into the world (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b, 2014).

In order to do so, this paper proceeds with a brief introduction of the AfD and points out why existing approaches towards populism are not able to fully grasp the contextual and particularly the affective dimensions of the AfD's populist project. Subsequently, and relying on insights from affect studies, a new understanding of the AfD's counter-hegemonic project will be developed. Finally, this paper will take first steps towards translating this theoretical approach into a methodological framework apt to 'read' for populist affects.

The AfD: A völkisch-populist party made in Germany

Since 2015, the AfD is univocally classified as far-right, right-wing or radical right populist party, implying that an ethno-nationalist construction of the German people and the defamation of established parties and racialised others as enemies of the German people is a central feature of the AfD's political positioning (e.g. Art, 2018; Breeze, 2019; Decker, 2020; Fawzi, 2017; Grabow, 2016; Häusler, 2018; Lees, 2018; Schmitt-Beck, 2017; Seongcheol, 2017). To underline the particular German character and historical continuities of the AfD's ideology and political positions, Häusler (2018) coined the term 'völkisch'- authoritarian[1] populism to describe the AfD. The term völkisch captures an idea of an ethnic German people and was, together with terms like *Volksgemeinschaft* a central element in Nazi ideology and propaganda. Describing the AfD as *völkisch* thus underlines the ideological continuities between Nazism and the ideals of the AfD.

What populism?

While völkisch thus characterizes the AfD's particular special, temporal and conceptual situatedness in a German context, the question remains how the concept of populism can provide a theoretical vantage point for understanding how the AfD is not only exploiting fears of the influx of non-European migrants but challenges the established politico-cultural order in modern Germany more fundamentally. Categorizing the AfD as radical right populist party promoting a nativist-authoritarian agenda and a thin-centred ideology that divides society between 'pure' people and corrupt elites (Mudde, 2011, p.12) (Mudde, 2004) (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p.6) makes it possible to compare the AfD to other populist parties and enables scholars to corelate supply side factors (positions in the party program) to public opinion and attitudes present among the electorate (demand-side factors) (e.g., Decker, 2016; Fawzi, 2017; Grimm, 2015; Jäckle, Wagschal, & Kattler, 2018; Priester, 2018; Rippl, 2018). However, this does not address the 'root cause' for the success of populist parties (Abromeit, 2017, p.182). With regard to the AfD, categorizing the party as (radical right) populist tells little about the party's political maneuvering and the due promotion of a populist subject position in modern Germany.

To develop a more nuanced understanding the AfD's maneuvering, two approaches focusing on the discursive construction of populist projects provide fruitful vantage points. Here insights from Critical Discourse Analysis, most prominently promoted by Ruth Wodak (2015) offer a comprehensive account of how radical right populists construct and mobilize the people and their opposition towards 'the elites' and racialized others in a specific socio-cultural and historic context (Reisigl, 2017; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; Wodak, 2015; Wodak & Forchtner, 2014). According to Wodak, the discursive construction of 'elites' and ethnic others as something or someone to be either fearful of or resentful towards, offers populists' supporters a subject position from which to interpret political issues and hold due attitudes and opinions. According to the Discourse Historical Approach, vertical affect (people vs. elites) as well as xenophobic and antisemitic horizontal affects (Wodak & Forchtner, 2014, p.237) are discursively established through references to specific elements of the national past. This offers a first step towards approaching the AfD not as 'just another' form of (far-right) populism in Europe or the Western world, but allows to consider the AfD in context of contemporary Germany that has made a strong Holocaust remembrance culture and duly the resolution of a 'Never again!' the core of its political order.

While, Wodak's approach promotes emotion as central element of populism, it only offers a limited theoretical conceptualization of affects and emotions that seem to be immediate effects of objective meanings-making through semiotic elements and constellations, which doesn't account for the particularity of affect and emotion as subjective, bodily and embodied experiences (Ahmed, 2004b; von Scheve, 2018). Moreover, populism seems to feature primarily negative emotions, namely fear, thus not sufficiently taking account of the affective complexity of far-right politics (Leser & Spissinger, 2020, p.327).

Another strand of scholarship that understands populism as discursive formation is the post-foundational approach most prominently put forward by Ernesto Laclau that conceptualizes social order, ideologies and (subject) identities not as existing pre-discursively but as relational, contingent symbolic structure, (re-)produced, (re-)negotiated and (re-)constructed (Carpentier, 2018, p.152) through discursive articulations. Accordingly, populism is conceptualized as a logic of articulation that

constitutes the ontological basis of the political and is constitutive of political identities that only comes into being through articulation (Laclau, 2005a, p.72f.). Accordingly, populist discourse does not express what 'the people' are but brings into being the people as political through the production of political frontiers between us ('the people') and them (the 'other'). What is more, populist projects are struggles for hegemony vis á vis its constitutive outside, challenge the established order by aiming to (re-)fixate and (re-)sediment (Marchart, 2007, p.139) relations among discursive elements.

The interplay of the logics of equivalence and the logics of difference are inherent to populist articulations (Stavrakakis & Howarth, 2000), establishing relational links between individual discursive elements (Nonhoff, 2018). Accordingly, the popular identity rests in the dichotomic division of the social space through the articulation of antagonistic frontier between 'the people' whose demands are linked through their unfulfilled-ness vis a vis a dominating outside (Laclau, 2005a, p.115). It is through the bridging between the particularity of single demands and the totality of different demands through equivalently links that political subject identities are (re-)produced (Laclau, 2005b, p.39). In this context, the 'empty signifier' plays a central role as pars pro toto for the universality of the equivalential chain: Initially an individual demand, an empty signifier loses most of its particular meaning and comes to signify something quite different from itself - the total chain of equivalential demands (Laclau, 2005a, p. 95). Duly, empty signifiers bring homogeneity (linking demands) into a highly heterogeneous reality. Thus, empty signifiers constitute the very moment that a discursive identity and thus the populist subject position is (re-)produced through articulation (Laclau, 2005a, p.98)

Contending that "differential and equivalential logics would be unintelligible without an affective dimension" Laclau (2005a, p.111), Laclau argues, that a radical affective investment in the empty signifier is essential for the articulation of a popular subject position. Here, empty signifiers become the embodiment of mythical fullness (Laclau, 2005a, p.115) that become a source of enjoyment (jouissance) This articulation of a mythical totality, makes the empty signifier become meaningful as "rallying point of passionate investments" (Laclau, 2005a, p.116). Populist rhetoric and performances must thus be understood as having an inherent affective appeal (Palonen, 2018, p.311). However, while this understanding stresses the centrality of affect in the emergence of subject identities (Marttila, 2018, p.30), it establishes respective investments as rather one-dimensional and uni-directional and is not fully fit to think of a populist subject identity as involving more complex affective configurations and modes of investments.

Building on insights from Wodak and Laclau, yet arguing for an understanding of populism that puts affect and emotions at the center, I suggest to conceptualize (far-right) populism as primarily affective, counter-hegemonic project that (re-)produces sameness and difference within a specific socio-cultural, political and historical context through the orchestration of affects. In the following, I am therefore to develop an understanding of how the AfD as völkisch-populist party does not only construct the German people as different from 'the elites' and racialized others, but mobilize an affective dissent that challenges the hegemonic politico-cultural order of modern post-War Germany.

Understanding Populism as counter-hegemonic Affective Landscape

The paradigm of affective societies (Bens et al., 2019) understands affect and emotion as an intrinsic part of all social, cultural and political practices constitutes the vantage point for conceptualizing the affective dimension of contemporary populism. Duly, the ways in which populist actors enable new and different ways of feeling one's way into the world (Ahmed, 2004b) emerges as central research interest.

Affective Landscapes as complex ways feeling into the worlds

According to von Scheve (2018, p.49) affects are best understood as "general, ubiquitous and primarily bodily mode of being or world-directedness" (von Scheve 2018, p.47) that is to be found not 'inside' individual (human) bodies but in the relations between/among individual and/or collective bodies and the surrounding world. Accordingly, affects play a central role in (re-)producing or challenging social and political power relations, orders and borders as they are tantamount in aligning or dis-aligning certain (individual or collective) bodies with other bodies (Ahmed, 2004b, p.12), thus producing affective communities.

Resonating with this notion of affects as central to social and political order, Lawrence Grossberg introduced the concept of affective landscapes to describe "a complex social way of being in the world" (Grossberg, 2018, p.91) that "hold[s] the world together [through] determining what is allowed and forbidden within a socio-cultural space in so far as [is] shapes the experienced reality, the subjective 'truth' of individuals as well as what or whom they affectively invest in" (Grossberg, 2018, p.93). Instead of following Grossberg outline of general affective conditions of contemporary Western societies, this paper adapts the concept of an affective landscape to grasps complex ways of being in – or feeling into (Ahmed, 2004b) – the world that incorporate a variety of affective dispositions towards a variety of bodies and objects.

Affective landscapes and counter-hegemony

This conceptualisation of affective landscapes puts not the struggle for affective hegemony at the heart of the populist project. Affective formations structuring social order, political power relations and subject identities must not be understood as universal 'truth of an era' (Williams, 1975, p.47) but rather as historically contingent, constantly re-produced and contested within a given socio-cultural and tempo-spatial context (Harding & Pribram, 2004, p.882). While one affective landscape might thus be dominant or relatively sedimented and appear as quasi-natural, alternative ways of feeling into the world can be (re-)articulated to challenge the established (affective) order. This opens up a way to think about the struggle for cultural and political hegemony as essentially being a competition between different affective formations (re-)producing and sustaining or undermining and challenging the existing hegemonic order. Accordingly, the far-right counter-hegemonic project in Germany can be conceptualised first and foremost an affective endeavour, aiming to de-stabilise the dominant national order by offering an alternative affective landscape that dissents from established ways of feeling.

Populism as affective dissent against the hegemonic Affective Governance

Conceptualising the AfD as counter-hegemonic project demands for a closer look at the affective order that structures modern, post-Holocaust Germany and against which the AfD's populist project is constituted. Here, Nitzan Shoshan's book The Management of Hate (2016) offers an essential vantage point. Shoshan introduces the concept of affective governance to describe how the German state "seeks to orchestrate, induce and defuse a set of […] affective dispositions" (Shoshan, 2016, p.17) different national imaginaries and thus multi affective relations towards bodies and objects re-presenting these imaginaries. The modern Federal Republic thus continuously re-constitutes itself through the management of an affective landscape that direct emotions like fear, shame and repulsion towards Nazi Germany and its contemporary representations and encourages emotions like pride and hope towards a cosmopolitan, self-reflexive, civic nation. In this reading, Holocaust memory and particularly the re-occurring commemoration of its victims and respectively German guilt becomes an affective resource in the orchestration the reproduction the dominant German order. Here, modern Germany is reproduced as community of reformed perpetrators, affectively invested in liberal democratic values in face of past atrocities. The AfD, then, must be understood as counter-hegemonic political project that aims to de-stabilize and offer an alternative to modern Germany's established affective order. A project that (re-)produces an alternative affective landscape enabling (German) subjects to feel into the world as a German characterized by völkisch notions of national being and belonging. Rather than just mobilizing negative emotions, the AfD offers its supporters a more complex way of being and feeling that constituted in opposition to and thus dissents from the affective underpinnings of the dominant politico-cultural order in post-Holocaust Germany.

Reading for Affect: Towards a Topography of populist Affective Landscapes

Understanding populism as inherently affective project, requires a methodology that is apt to analyze the affective landscape mobilized by the AfD. In the following, I will suggest first steps towards such a methodological framework.

A reading for affect (Berg, von Scheve, Ural, & Walter-Jochum, 2019; Kølvraa, 2015) of representational practices is not interested in their meaning but how they make social reality meaningful to subjects. Accordingly, the methodological approach developed here aims to illuminate how the AfD's rhetoric-performative practices make certain bodies and objects matter to individuals in certain ways, thus offering a distinct way to feel into the world. It thus aims for a topography of an affective landscape capturing the qualities and intensities of the relations between a multitude of bodies and objects.

Referring back to a postfoundational understanding of populism and particularly, empty signifiers as well as the logics of equivalence (and difference) and antagonism, I content that affectively charged objects, symbols and semiotic elements as well as the reproduction of internal sameness and simultaneously differentiation from an antagonistic outside are central in re-producing and structuring

the populist project. The central challenge then is not only to translate these concepts into an affective ontology but to find systematic ways to read e.g., visual material for affect.

Affective Landmarks: 'Sticky' Objects and Bodies

In order to operationalize the concept of empty signifier I suggest looking for bodies and objects that occupy a central position within populist articulations and are the target of affective investments. Rather than jouissance, as unidirectional, mythical investment however, an analysis that aims to understand the affective complexity of a populist project should focus on the affects that get 'stuck' (Ahmed, 2004b) to their surface through rhetoric-performative action.

Central and affectively charged objects and bodies can be understood as those elements without which a given text or performance would be possible but not the same – namely because it would lose its specific meaningfulness. Within rhetoric-performative practices affectively charged and thus 'sticky' (Ahmed, 2004b) objects or bodies have two intertwined functions: They can be considered as affective landmarks, shaping the character of the affective landscape as well as offering points of orientation to the subject. An analysis of 'sticky' objects and bodies as affective landmarks must focus on three questions: (1) what are the affective landmarks within a given material, (2) how are affective investments direct towards these particular bodies and objects and (3) how are these investments different from the hegemonic affective governance?

Considering the first question, I suggest that a high frequency and saliency of their appearance make objects or bodies affective landmarks. Here, saliency can be understood as a spatial categories or modes of appearing when it comes to visual material: Bodies and objects that are in the spatial middle of a picture or in the center of the actions depicted around them, that appear physically close to a protagonist or in an emphasized/exposed position (e.g., elevated or erected) can be considered as central for the affective impact of a given visual.

Identifying how affective investments are directed towards particular bodies and objects requires a more complex analysis. Referring back to the understanding of affects as the qualities of bodily relationalities (Berg et al., 2019), the key here is to shed light on the affective relations encouraged towards those objects and bodies that were identified as affective landmarks. Regarding visual material, spatial parameters and directions as well as the ways in which bodies and objects appear in relation to other bodies indicate the affective investments directed towards them. Among others, (different degrees of) physical closeness, and modes of contact among bodies or between bodies and objects can be indicative of their affective relationship. Furthermore, affective relations can be analyzed through the reading of the physiognomic surface of (depictions of) human bodies, e.g., their facial expression and body postures, to identify how human bodies are affected by certain bodies and objects (Gibbs & Angel, 2006).

Furthermore, I suggest that affective landmarks should be 'read' for the affective investments directed towards them in the specific context of the socio-political and cultural order the populist project aims to challenge. This can be achieved through a consideration of where and how certain objects and specific types or formations of bodies usually emerge within the hegemonic order. Based on this, a reading for

affect must account for how respective bodies and objects within a populist affective landscape appear ‘out of place’ if compared to their position within the hegemonic affective governance.

Attuned Bodies: Alternative Affects

In order to analytically grasp how the antagonistic frontier between counter-hegemonic project and the outside is emerging, I suggest an affective reading of the postfoundational concepts logics of equivalence and antagonism. For this, I refer to Sara Ahmed’s idea of affective ‘attunement’ as central mechanism creating socio-political orders and borders through the alignment of certain bodies and the dis-alignment of others (Ahmed, 2014). Accordingly, an analysis of how this attunement happens and what sort of bodies emerge as attuned and familiar or ‘out of tune’ and strange, must be a central element of reading for affect.

Duly, visual elements must be read for the shared affective states through which individual bodies merge into collective subjects and illuminate how bodies become aligned with each other, because of common affective states, because they feel the same about (or rather towards) something or someone.

Therefore, depictions of the physiognomic surface, indicating the (common) affective investments of human bodies must be systematically analyzed. Here, scripted, ritualized embodied performances are an important means to let bodies emerge in common affective states as they establish a particular framework in which the bodies of the protagonists are assigned relatively narrow, prescribed roles and affective investments in something or someone; e.g., the happy guests attending a wedding, attuned through their similar affective investments towards the (happy) couple. Moreover, similar face expressions and bodily postures, physical proximity or contact and a common bodily and sensual directedness (e.g., turning or leaning towards the same direction, looking in the same direction or at the same thing) as well as the degree to which bodies appear as simultaneously and equally immersed in a particular affective state can be read as indicators for an affective attunement.

‘Out-of-tune’ Bodies: Affective Strangers

As third a final step, a topography of populists’ affective landscapes must illuminate how antagonism comes co-constitute populist subject identity and thus register how an antagonistic outside is reproduced through the orchestration of affective dispositions. To do so, the analytical must be to identify affective strangers, human bodies that according to Ahmed (2014), emerge as different from the attuned collective subject due of their non-attunement to the affective dispositions that characterize the collective body.

In visual material this can once more be accessed by comparing bodily surfaces: Those bodies that based on their facial expressions and bodily postures show affective dispositions that differ from those of the collective body can be considered as ‘out of tune’. Furthermore, strange bodies can be identified through their relative position to those bodies that appear as affectively attuned. In visual material, physical distance or a confrontational positioning between attuned and non-attuned bodies can provide

insight into the relationship between both and help to determine to what degree the attunement of the former relies on the presence of the latter.

Conclusion

In order to improve academic understanding of the AfD's success in contemporary German and inspired by a post-foundational scholarship, this paper suggested to understand populism as counter-hegemonic affective landscape against a dominant politico-cultural order and its affective underpinnings. Accordingly, the core of the AfD's völkisch populist project lies in (re-)articulation of affective dispositions that reproduce counter-hegemonic way of feeling into the world as a German, an *alternative German-ness* as political subject position, that challenges the established affective governance in modern Germany.

Furthermore, this paper made some first, rather general elaborations on how to translate this new understanding of populism into a methodological framework, enabling a topography of the affective landscapes (re-)articulated by (far right) populists. It suggested affective landmarks and affective attunement and dis-attunement as middle range concepts (Howarth, 2004, p. 267) apt to translate a post-foundationalist ontology into a methodological framework for the systematic analysis of populist affective dissent and capture the complex, multidirectional affective intensities of the party's populist project. While this methodological framework might need further development and refinement, it constitutes a first step towards bridging the gap between abstracts conception of affective investments and intensities and the concrete orchestration of affects in representational practices, grasping the complex affective dimension of a particular populist project.

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